CAPE CORAL *Living*

JAN/FEB 2025
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Tracking down bargains at the flea market

Pier Pleasure
Where to find local fishing docks

Literary Celebration
SWFL Reading Festival keeps growing

Owlish Delight
Burrowing right into our hearts

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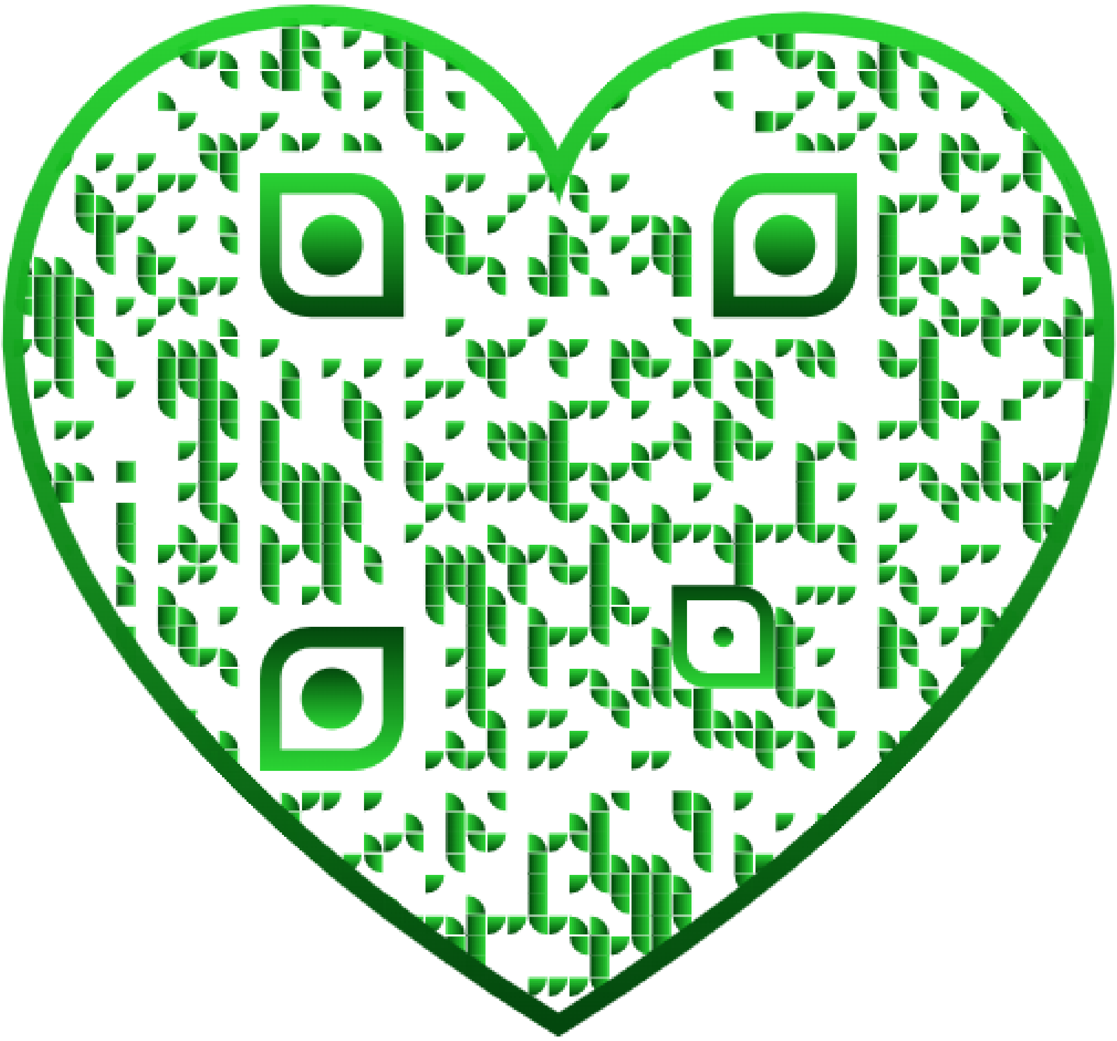

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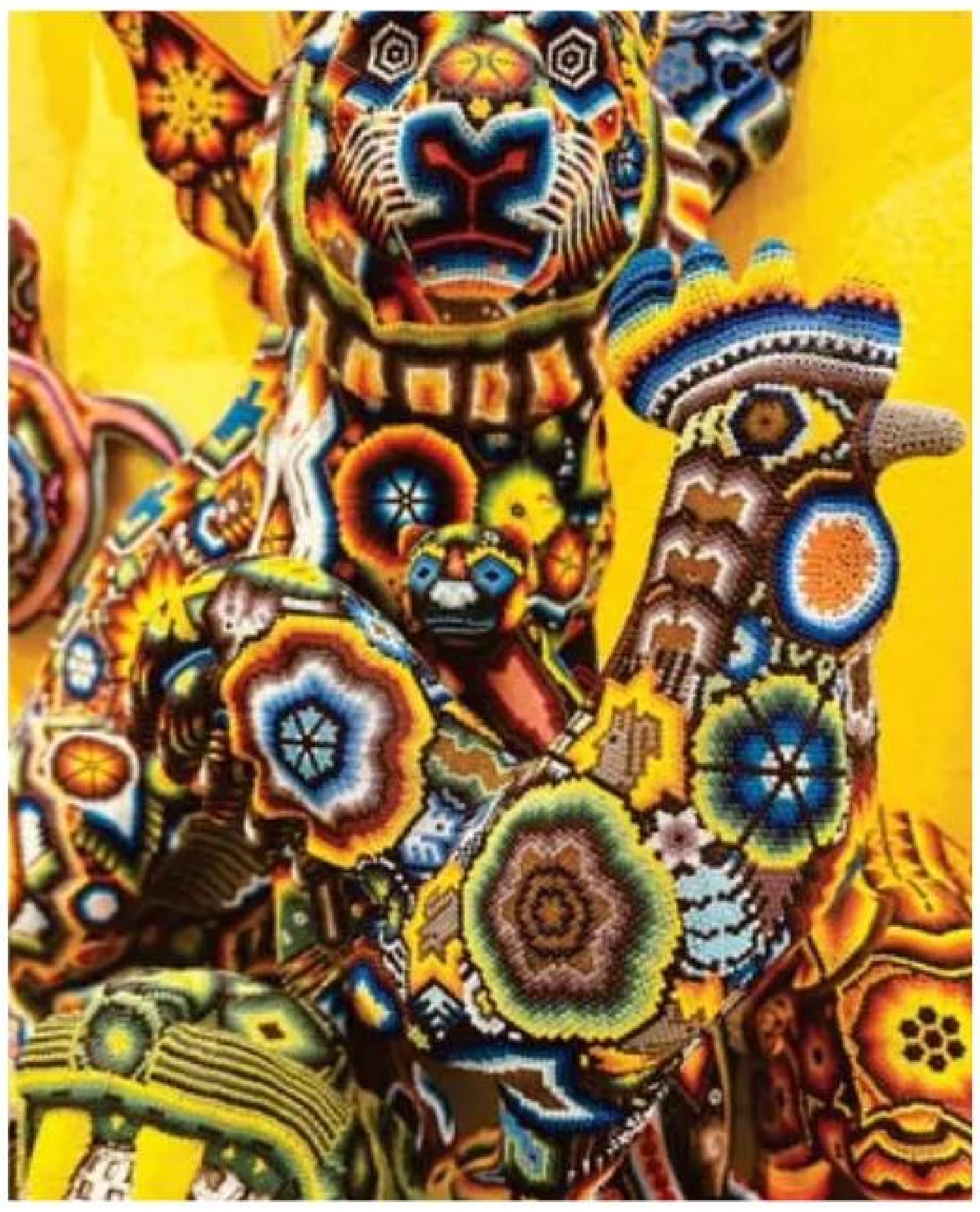
THE BEAT GOES ON AT McCOLLUM HALL

The new Music Walk at McCollum Hall featuring the Night Market will help bring people and live entertainment back to the historic Fort Myers site.



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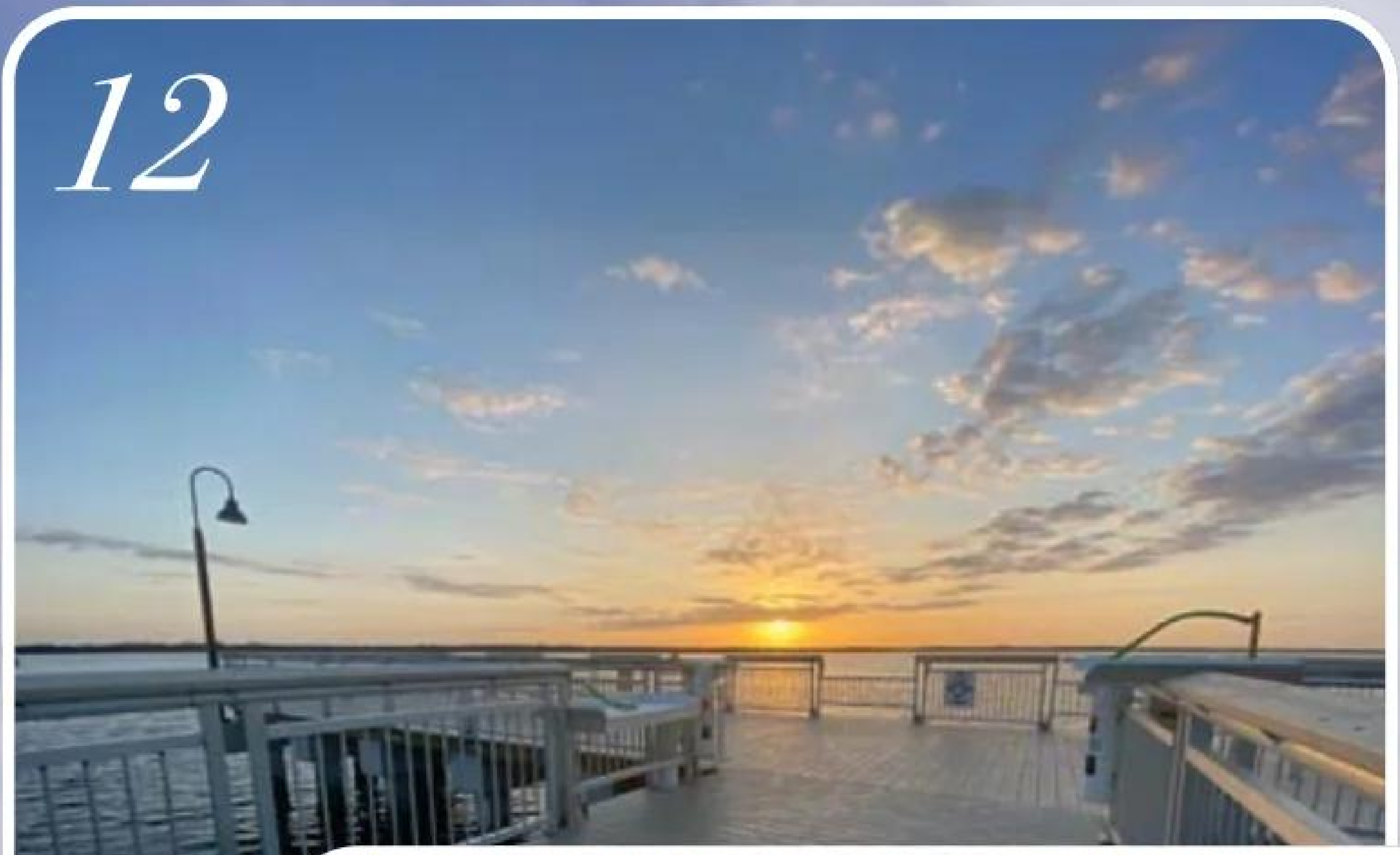

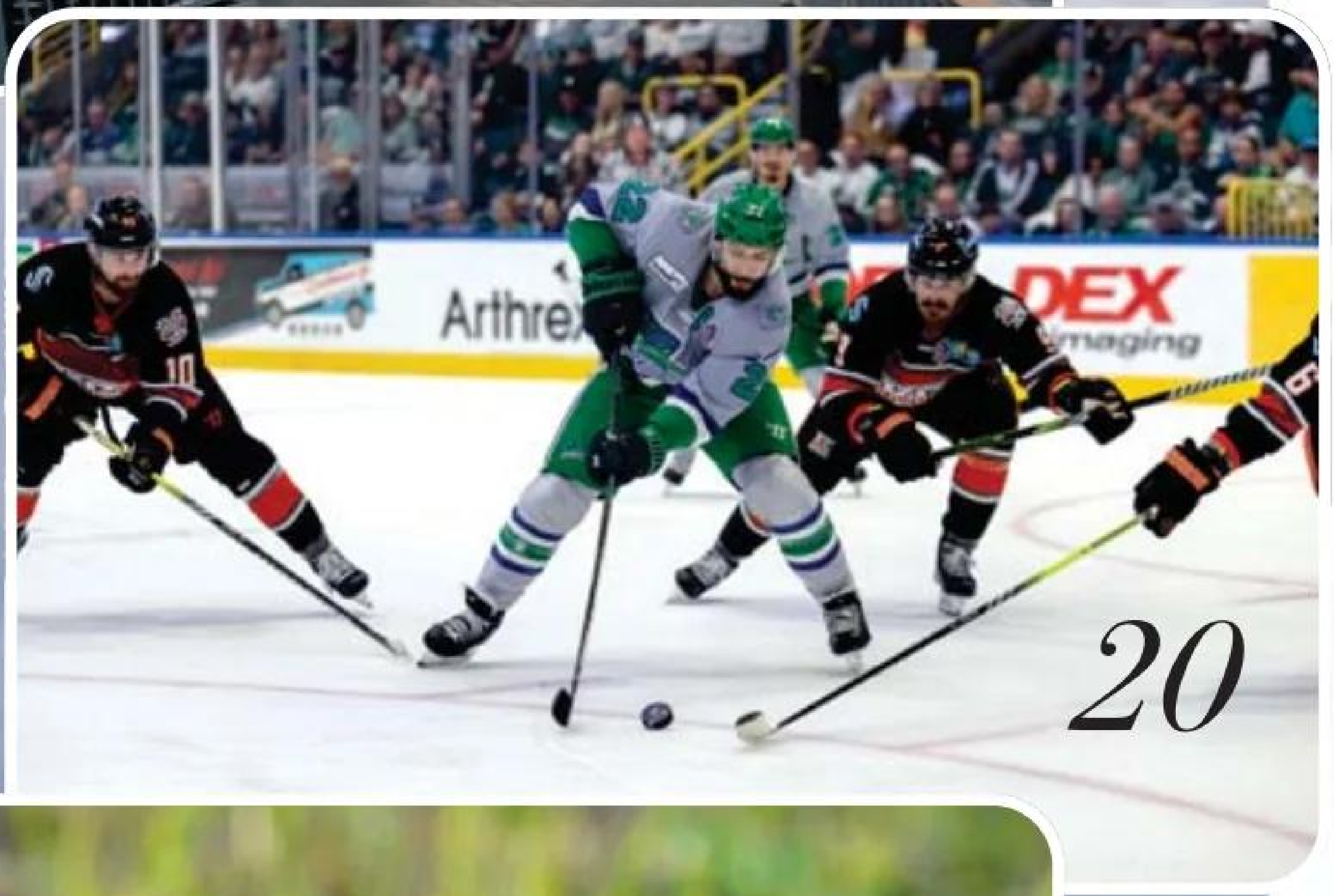

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Coming up in March/April

Whether it's the gulf, a river, or a lake, being near the water is always magical. In our March/April issue, we'll bring you all things water-related and will explore a few resorts that are on the radar for something special.

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A gift for jetBlue customers:
See page 79 for a special offer.

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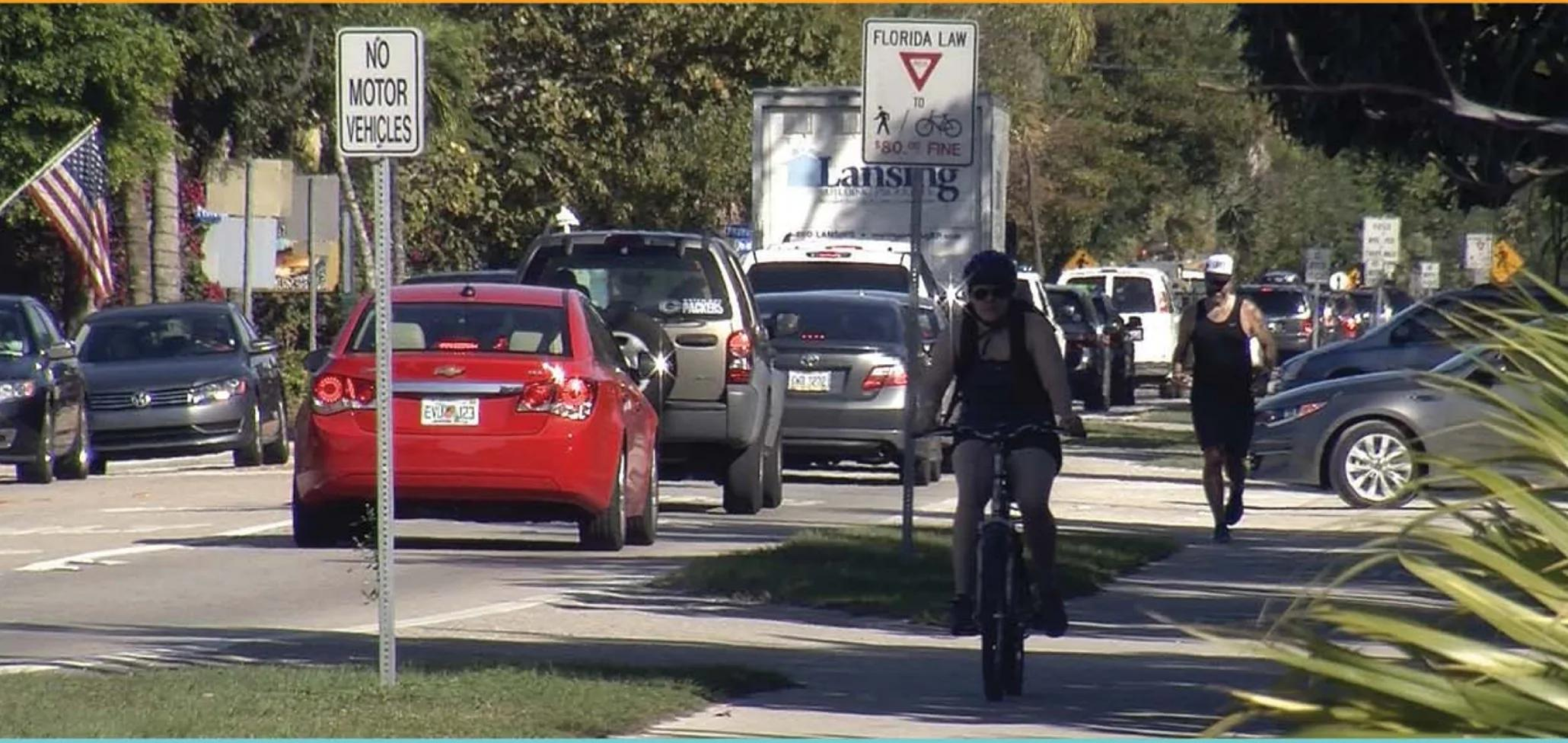
Important Traffic Related Information for Sanibel!



As the residents and businesses on Sanibel continue to recover from the affects of Hurricane Ian, the City would like to share some information regarding traveling around the island. Please keep in mind that travel patterns are different now and it may take longer to get on and off the island. Pay attention to surroundings and please keep your speed down!

TO KEEP EVERYONE LIVING AND WORKING ON THE ISLAND SAFE:

- Pay attention to construction activities that are occurring along the roadways
- Be aware of pedestrian and bicycle traffic using the shared-use paths and crosswalks
- Plan in advance to travel so as to accommodate for longer lines coming on and off the island
- Check the City of Sanibel website for the most current updates: www.MySanibel.com

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Together we will recover. #SanibelStrong

Mayor Richard Johnson, City of Sanibel

LOOK PAST YOUR SHORTCOMINGS

Start 2025 by returning to your best self

Just a few days before having all the ingredients sorted for a Thanksgiving dinner with family and friends, I was trying to decide what I should write for the new year 2025. If that sounds like I was getting ahead of myself, remember that in publishing we work several months ahead. Anyway, preparing for that special dinner got me thinking about talents and gifts.

I had switched on a broadcast channel on my phone, and all I kept hearing were membership discount offers from fitness clubs. "You're guaranteed to lose weight," they claimed.

Sounds great, right? Lose weight, and start fresh and light in 2025. Well, I looked at my 19-pound turkey and all the side dishes I had in mind to make, and I asked myself how many pounds my scale would show I gained after Thanksgiving and the holiday season. Suddenly, those fitness club commercials didn't sound so bad.

But then I thought about what else all that holiday feasting represented: spending time with family and friends, listening to everyone's wonderful stories, and being thankful for the blessings and successes of the past year. That, along with a renewed appreciation for getting in shape, eased my worries about adding a few extra pounds.

We all have some shortcomings. Overindulging can certainly be one. Another, though, is failing to see beyond our shortcomings. Sometimes, we are simply way too hard on ourselves. We forget that as imperfect as we are, we still have been blessed with gifts and talents that are valuable to both ourselves and others.

If you are unsure about where your true gifts and talents lie, just think about what you enjoyed doing most in your childhood. When we "grow up," we often grow out of what truly makes us happy. That's a shame. I've often asked myself why I gave up on things I liked to do when I was young. Life happens, it's true. But what about laughter? What about play? What about being active and full of energy?

Even as young adults, many of us had dreams of life after school—jobs, college, careers, family, success. We had goals, but then something happened. Maybe it's just that we neglected our true gifts and talents.

So, as we begin this new year, I want to encourage you to seek a return to your best self—the one who laughed, played, imagined, dreamed, loved, and was not hung up on your shortcomings. Instead of creating "a new you," as the fitness commercials promise, maybe 2025 can be a rebirth of the old you—the one who accidently got left behind. Look back and rediscover that inner child—who is just waiting to be let loose again.

Let this issue of your favorite magazine inspire you to get off to a good start in 2025.

Here's looking forward to a great year of rediscovery!

Daniela J. Jaeger

Daniela J. Jaeger
Group Publisher, TOTI Media

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BY DR. RANDALL NIEHOFF

LET'S GET PHYSICAL!

A resolution for the New Year

For 50 million years our biggest problems were too few calories and too little information.
For about 50 years our biggest problem has been too many calories and too much information.
—Penn Jillette (magician, actor, musician, inventor, author, TV personality)

For thousands of years people in cultures from the East and the West have marked the beginning of a new calendar year by making resolutions. It is an opportunity to reevaluate one's life and start fresh, to improve the quality of living by activating hope and gaining a sense of control. At the beginning of 2024 a survey of Americans by the data and business platform Statista revealed that the most common resolution of respondents was to save more money (59 percent); the next two goals were to exercise more (50 percent) and to eat healthier (47 percent)—which are two sides of the same coin (improving fitness).

As 2025 begins it seems clear that seeking better physical health will remain near the top for all of us, and while opportunities to work out are available in the cold gray of the north (especially indoors), we in Gulf Coast Florida have the benefit of warm sunshine and can go outdoors to exercise and play sports. But will we?

When it comes to getting physical, many of us who have a mind filled with good intentions inhabit a body that never gets the mental order to move. We embody the subject of Mark Twain's eloquently worded insult: *Why do you sit there looking like an envelope without any address on it?* Of course, when you behave like a "couch potato" there are at least four answers to his question.

First, there is what physicists call *inertia.* Put simply, it is the law that states "an object at rest tends to stay at rest." Yet for a thinking being who can exercise willpower, I suspect most of us choose to stay put because (a) it can hurt to move; and (b) working up a sweat commits us to follow through with the tedious tasks of washing our bodies and cleaning our clothes. Perhaps we need to resolve to accept the adage: *No pain, no gain.*

A second response is more psychological: We are smart enough to realize how much effort, energy, and time it will take to increase our flexibility, muscle tone, lung capacity, and heart rate (aka "to get in better shape"). Perhaps we need to resolve to accept the ancient wisdom: *Strive for progress, not perfection.*

Old road
Same road
Safe road
Fresh start

PHOTO BY JON ANDERS WIKEN

A third rejoinder involves an issue that would have befuddled dear old Mark Twain. He had not experienced the rise of high-tech devices and addictive algorithms that lead to increased screen time and less physical activity. Neurological studies of human brain functions confirm the cause and effects of what is popularly known as "TikTok depression" or "Silicon Valley zombification" or "simulator sickness." Scientists frame the process as the dopamine loop: (1) We seek the stimulus of a fascinating screen distraction; (2) we experience the pleasure of a dopamine release; (3) the desire for more reinforces our screen search; (4) a habit is formed and we become addicted.

The more addicts rely on these stimuli, the less pleasure they receive, eventually creating *anhedonia*—the complete absence of enjoyment in an experience supposedly pursued for pleasure. Perhaps at this new year we need to resolve to practice the old graceful advice: *Forgive your younger self. Believe in your current self. Create your future self.*

Finally, there is a growing contingent of sports fans falling victim to what some scholars are referring to as the dopamine culture [read *Dopamine Nation: Finding Balance in the Age of Indulgence,* by Anna Lembke, MD (psychiatrist), and *The State of the Culture 2024,* by Ted Gioia (venture capital consultant and historian)].

Clearly, there has been a progression through three cultures: (1) slow traditional; (2) fast modern; and (3) dopamine.

For example, in the area of communication folks have moved from (1) handwritten letters to (2) voicemail/memos to (3) short texts. In athletics some have gone from (1) playing a sport to (2) watching a

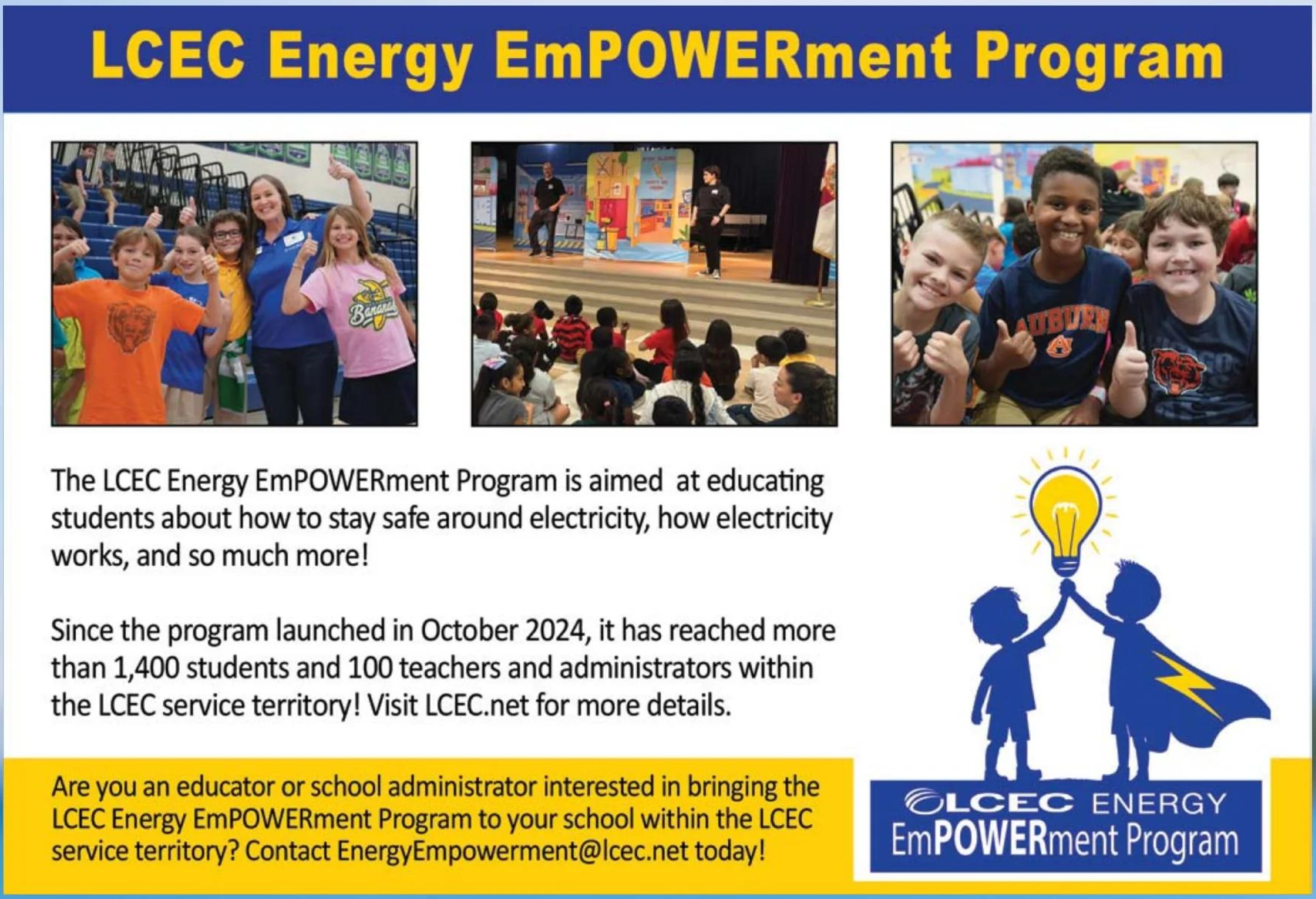
We in Gulf Coast Florida have the benefit of warm sunshine and can ***go outdoors*** *to exercise and play sports.* ***But will we?***

sport to (3) gambling on a sport. Perhaps now is the time to resolve to learn from the philosopher Will Durant, recipient of the Pulitzer Prize (1968) and Presidential Medal of Freedom (1977):

"Health lies in action, and so it graces youth. To be busy is the secret of grace, and half the secret of content…. In Utopia, said Thoreau, each would build his own home; and then song would come back to the heart of man, as it comes to the bird when it builds its nest. If we cannot build our homes, we can at least walk and throw and run; and we should never be so old as merely to watch games instead of playing them. 'Let us play' is as good as 'Let us pray,' and the results are more assured."

Plato taught that you can learn more about a person in one hour of play than in a year of conversation. As we resolve to "get more physical" in the new year, may we learn more about ourselves in play—and become healthier in body and mind.

Ran Niehoff has been trying to recreate a better self on Sanibel since 1991.



LCEC Energy EmPOWERment Program

The LCEC Energy EmPOWERment Program is aimed at educating students about how to stay safe around electricity, how electricity works, and so much more!

Since the program launched in October 2024, it has reached more than 1,400 students and 100 teachers and administrators within the LCEC service territory! Visit LCEC.net for more details.

Are you an educator or school administrator interested in bringing the LCEC Energy EmPOWERment Program to your school within the LCEC service territory? Contact EnergyEmpowerment@lcec.net today!

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BY ANN MARIE O'PHELAN

PURE PIER PLEASURE

Area fishing piers provide easy access to the water

NO CAST NETTING OFF PIER

Avid anglers don't always have access to a boat, but fishing piers provide an opportunity to reel in a big one without watercraft. "You can catch most common freshwater fish species from a pier as you would from the shore or a boat—bass, crappie, bluegill, redear, catfish," says Michelle Kerr, communications manager for the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.

The secret to fishing off a pier is to "match the bait up with the species you are targeting, such as crickets/worms for panfish, minnows for crappie, chicken liver/commercial stink bait for catfish," adds Kerr.

Southwest Florida has a number of fishing piers throughout the area. "The pier locations vary between freshwater, brackish, and salt water," notes Timothy Engstrom, Lee County's public information specialist.

The fishing pier at Matlacha Park and Community Center was damaged in 2022 by Hurricane Ian but is now restored. The park also has a new boat ramp and kayak launch.

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Locations in Cape Coral, Fort Myers, Lehigh Acres, and Estero *(New Location)*

Galt Preserve in St. James City has a popular fishing pier.

Local piers include those at Galt Preserve in St. James City, Hickey Creek Mitigation Park in Alva, Manatee Park on the Orange River in Fort Myers, and Matlacha Park and Community Center. (A few piers are still closed because of recent hurricane damage, including Fort Myers Beach Pier and Matanzas Bridge Fishing Pier in Fort Myers Beach, and North Shore Park in North Fort Myers.)

Galt Preserve offers a pier with an incredible view of the water and surrounding backdrop. The water is brackish. The preserve also has 2.5 miles of hiking trails and boardwalks. It is home to a variety of plant and animal species such as bald eagles, egrets, snakes, tortoises, and lizards.

Find publicly accessible fishing piers, jetties, fishing-specific bridges, and fishing fingers statewide at the Florida Fishing Pier Finder (myfwc.com/research/gis/regional-projects/pier-finder).

Florida requires a freshwater fishing license to fish in freshwater and a saltwater license to fish in saltwater. There are license exemptions for youth under 16 years of age, resident seniors aged 65 or older with proof of age or residency, Florida residents certified as totally and permanently disabled, and others listed at myfwc.com/license/recreational/do-i-need-one.

To obtain a Florida freshwater or saltwater fishing license:

- Purchase online at GoOutdoorsFlorida.com.
- Purchase in person at a license agent or tax collector’s office.
- Call toll-free 888-FISH-FLORIDA (888-347-4356) or 888-HUNT-FLORIDA (888-486-8356).
- Download the Fish|Hunt FL App on Apple and Android devices.
- Find out more at myfwc.com/license/recreational/how-to-order.

Hickey Creek Mitigation Park consists of 862 acres of pine flatwoods, freshwater marshes, and cypress swamps. It has a picnic area and three looped hiking trails totaling five miles. The park is home to scrub jays and gopher tortoises. Its pier is located on a winding tributary of the Caloosahatchee River, and the water here is brackish.

Manatee Park's fishing pier is along the Orange River. The water is brackish. The park serves as a non-captive, warm-water refuge for the Florida manatee during the winter months when the gulf temperature falls below 68 degrees. The park also offers a butterfly garden, hiking trails, kayak launch, and picnic area.

Matlacha Park and Community Center encompasses nine acres on Matlacha Pass approaching Pine Island. In addition to the brand-new fishing pier, the park has a basketball court, children's playground, and two pavilions available to rent. A saltwater license is required to fish off the pier.

In addition to the piers, area bridges spanning saltwater inlets or rivers such as the Caloosahatchee, Peace, and Estero can provide ample fishing spots. "Whether it's inshore, nearshore, or pier fishing, there is always something to catch in Southwest Florida," says Captain Justin Stuller, manager of Estero River Outfitters, which offers an extensive selection of canoes and kayaks for purchase or rental, along with a bait and tackle shop selling live fresh and saltwater bait.

The new fishing pier at Matlacha Park and Community Center

The fishing pier at Alva's Hickey Creek Mitigation Park

As you pack up your bait and gear when heading out to fish, be sure to include your fishing license, sunscreen, sun hat, plenty of water, a cooler with snacks and drinks, and a comfortable chair.

Ann Marie O'Phelan is a Southwest Florida resident and a regular contributor to TOTI Media.

LOCAL FISHING PIERS

Galt Preserve
3661 Stringfellow Road, St. James City

Hickey Creek Mitigation Park
17980 Palm Beach Blvd., Alva

Manatee Park on the Orange River
10901 Palm Beach Blvd., Fort Myers

Matlacha Park and Community Center
4577 Pine Island Road, Matlacha

CURRENTLY CLOSED FOR REPAIRS

Fort Myers Beach Pier
10 Old San Carlos Blvd., Fort Myers Beach

Matanzas Bridge Fishing Pier
700 Fishermans Wharf, Fort Myers Beach

North Shore Park
13001 N. Cleveland Avenue, North Fort Myers

BY ANN MARIE O’PHELAN

A SANIBEL DINING/SHOPPING DUO

Over Easy Café and Suncatchers’ Dream popular destinations

Suncatchers’ Dream is a popular card and gift shop on Sanibel, featuring many ocean-themed products.

HAPPINESS
COMES IN
waves
dune

On Sanibel Island, there’s a popular restaurant and a fun gift shop right next door, so you can enjoy a delicious meal and then go shopping a few steps away. You don’t even have to repark the car.

The Over Easy Café serves up breakfasts and lunches, offering favorite morning items like French toast, pancakes, and country-fried steak and eggs, and midday meals of fresh salads, sandwiches, and wraps.

“Over Easy Café is loved by so many because of the consistency in our food—everything from the crab and asparagus omelet to the salmon Benedict to our fresh summer salad and our delicious wraps,” says Liza Clouse, who has owned the restaurant since 2007 with partner Trasi Sharp.

Also significant is the fact that breakfast lovers can sleep in, as breakfast is served until 2pm every day. “At Sanibel’s all-day breakfast café, you can still stop in for breakfast even after you’ve been shelling,” says Clouse. Famous for its food, friendly service, and welcoming atmosphere—both inside and out—it’s little wonder the locals love the restaurant. Kids 10 and under can choose from the kids’ menus for breakfast and lunch, with plenty of favorites such as sand-dollar pancakes and cheeseburgers. The outdoor seating is pet friendly.

The colorful dining room at Over Easy Café

Online shopping offers a few items to choose from if you want a souvenir, such as Over Easy Café t-shirts, hats, and socks, or a hand-thrown round belly mug for coffee.

After a delicious meal, you can do a little shopping right next door at Suncatchers’ Dream, one of the island’s popular card and gift shops. Shoppers can pick up handmade puzzles and wood boxes, books, locally made art and gifts, ceramic tiles, the shop’s famous catnip, and the colorful namesake suncatchers for windows.

“We also have the best selection of handmade greeting cards on the island,” says owner Daniel Thompson, as well as “Melanie Cech’s nautical glass sculptures, our finest artist showcased in the store. Her pieces are beautiful hand-pulled glass creatures by torch and attached to coral and hand embellished with 22-karat gold. And Dune Jewelry is made with local elements and gemstones.” Free gift wrapping is available.

Ann Marie O’Phelan is a Southwest Florida resident and a regular contributor to TOTI Media.

Over Easy Café,
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239-966-5114; overeasycafesanibel.com

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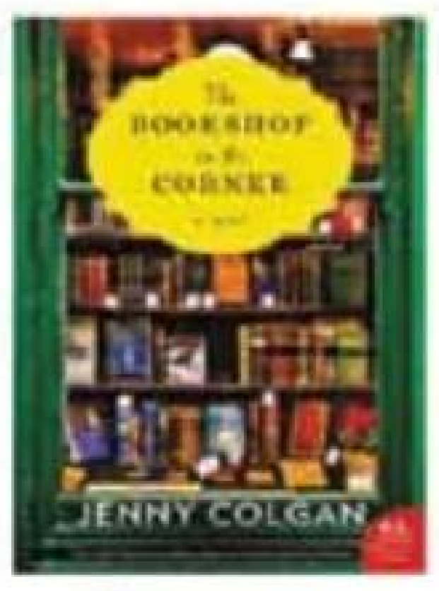
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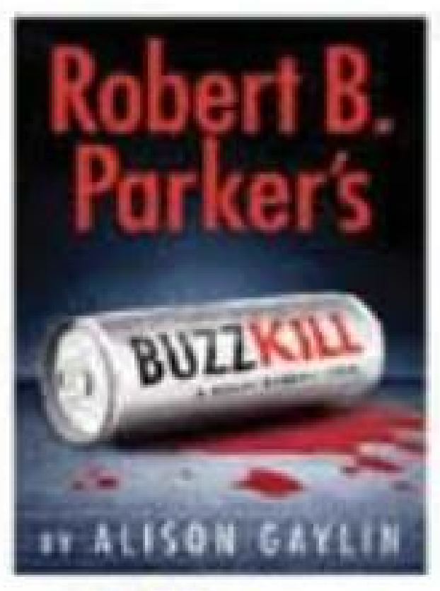
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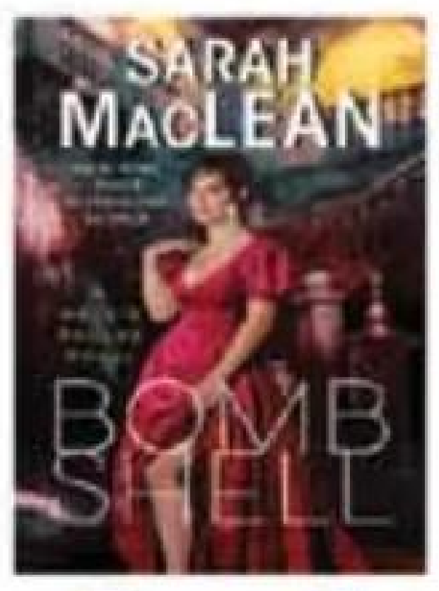
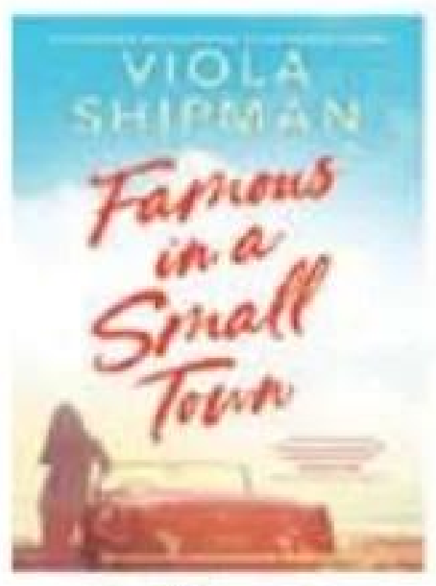
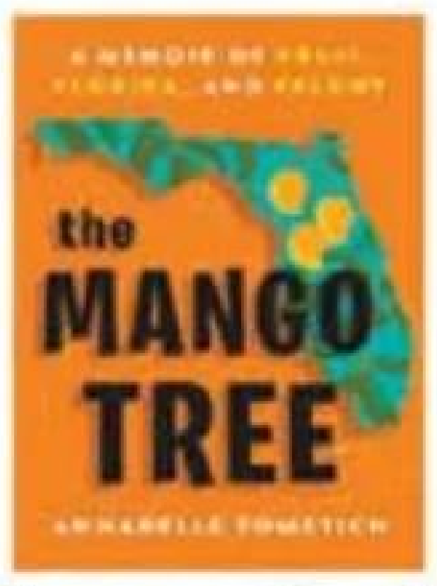

Sarah MacLean
Bombshell

Sarah MacLean


Viola Shipman
Famous in a Small Town

Viola Shipman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BY ANN MARIE O'PHELAN

FABULOUS FINDS AT THE FLEA MARKET

Fleamasters and Flamingo Island are a bargain hunter's dream

Whether you are a bargain shopper, a collector, or just looking for a fun family outing, local flea markets may be worth a trip. Two of the larger ones in Southwest Florida are Fleamasters Flea Market in Fort Myers and Flamingo Island Flea Market in Bonita Springs.

Fleamasters, which has been in business since 1986, is a whopping 400,000 square feet and offers 900 stores with more than one million items. The market is open year-round every Friday, Saturday, and Sunday from 9 am to 5 pm.

Flamingo Island, open since 1997, offers more than 600 indoor and outdoor vendors and is open year-round Friday, Saturday, and Sunday from 8 am to 4 pm.

Both markets are open air but mainly under a protective roof, so the hot sun and rain don't get in the way of an enjoyable experience. Plus, admission and parking are free.

"There is something for everyone at the flea market," says Jessica Jeffers, vice president of marketing for United Flea Markets, which owns and operates flea markets nationwide, including Fleamasters and Flamingo Island.

Both of these local markets offer shopping opportunities for bargain hunters and collectors, toys and games for kids, food and drinks for all, live music on the weekends featuring local

Thanks For Shopping

Great Gramma Devonne's Pasta Sauce 10-
Great Gramma Devonne's Pasta Sauce 10-

Top: Unique artwork at Fleamasters Flea Market

Right: Homemade fresh salsa

One of the offerings at Burger Blast

Asian eats from local restaurant Zen Deli at Fleamasters Flea Market

IF YOU GO

Flamingo Island Flea Market
11902 Bonita Beach Road SE, Bonita Springs
239-948-7799; flamingoisland.com

Fleamasters Flea Market
4135 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd., Fort Myers
239-334-7001; fleamastersfleamarket.com

PHOTOS ON BOTH PAGES COURTESY OF UNITED FLEA MARKETS

Perhaps what sets shopping at the flea markets apart, however, is the ability to barter and negotiate.

talent, and family events throughout the year such as the recent holiday shopping specials and holiday music. Check the online event calendar for upcoming weekend musical offerings and events.

Bargain shoppers will find practically anything and everything—shoes and boots, sunglasses, self-care items, plants and flowers, books, jewelry, fresh produce, homemade baked goods and pickled fare, and everyday items. “Collectors will find unique vintage rare coins, old gas station signs, 75-year-old tin cans, repurposed antiques such as old lamp shades made into new light fixtures, one-of-a-kind handmade T-shirts with funny sayings, and collectible items such as cookie jars, coins, sports memorabilia, and records,” says Jeffers.

Perhaps what sets shopping at the flea markets apart, however, is the ability to barter and negotiate. “The deals can be hard to beat, and there’s a bargain at every corner,” adds Jeffers. These measures help cut your spending, so there’s more money left in your pocket. Plus, watch for Senior Discount Fridays at Fleamasters and other specials at Flamingo Island.

If you’re looking for a great deal, a hidden treasure, a delicious meal, a good time—or all—head to one of the local flea markets where there’s first-rate fun and fabulous finds for the whole family.

Ann Marie O’Phelan is a Southwest Florida resident and a regular contributor to TOTI Media.

The food court offers plenty of choices to sustain your shopping energy.

One of the outside vendors sells potted plants and yard art at Flamingo Island Flea Market.

SPOTLIGHT ON FLAMINGO ISLAND FASHION

At Flamingo Island Flea Market, there’s a hidden gem for elegant women’s fashion. Shoppers can find stylish, upscale women’s clothing with a casually elegant flair at Shelly’s Casual. “We are a boutique with heart and style,” says owner and operator Shelly Cahill, who opened her store in 2009. “Shelly’s Casual isn’t just a clothing store—it’s a boutique that radiates warmth, style, and a welcoming vibe.”

The boutique’s attention to detail makes it feel as upscale as any traditional retail shop. Over the years, Cahill has sold clothing and fostered friendships with her clients, many of whom return season after season to browse her carefully curated selection.

Cahill believes flea market shopping is more than just a trip to pick up a few items; it’s an experience. “No matter what you come to the flea market for, you can always find something else, and there’s always something new, the atmosphere is lively, and there’s a diverse array of vendors,” she says. “Many visitors come out for the whole day, turning their visit into a full-day experience, with time to shop, have lunch, and enjoy the company of family and friends. It’s this variety, spontaneity, and sense of community that makes the flea market a destination where shoppers can return time and again to find new treasures and create lasting memories.”

Another advantage of the flea market location, adds Cahill, is that it draws visitors from around the world. “This unique location has given me the wonderful opportunity to connect with people from a myriad of cultural backgrounds, enhancing the shopping experience for me and my customers alike,” she says.

Shelly’s Casual is located in blue aisle spaces 10-18 at Flamingo Island Flea Market.

BY ANN MARIE O'PHELAN

The Florida Everblades is a minor-league professional team that is based in Estero at the Hertz Arena.

HIT THE ICE

Cold-weather sports, Florida-style

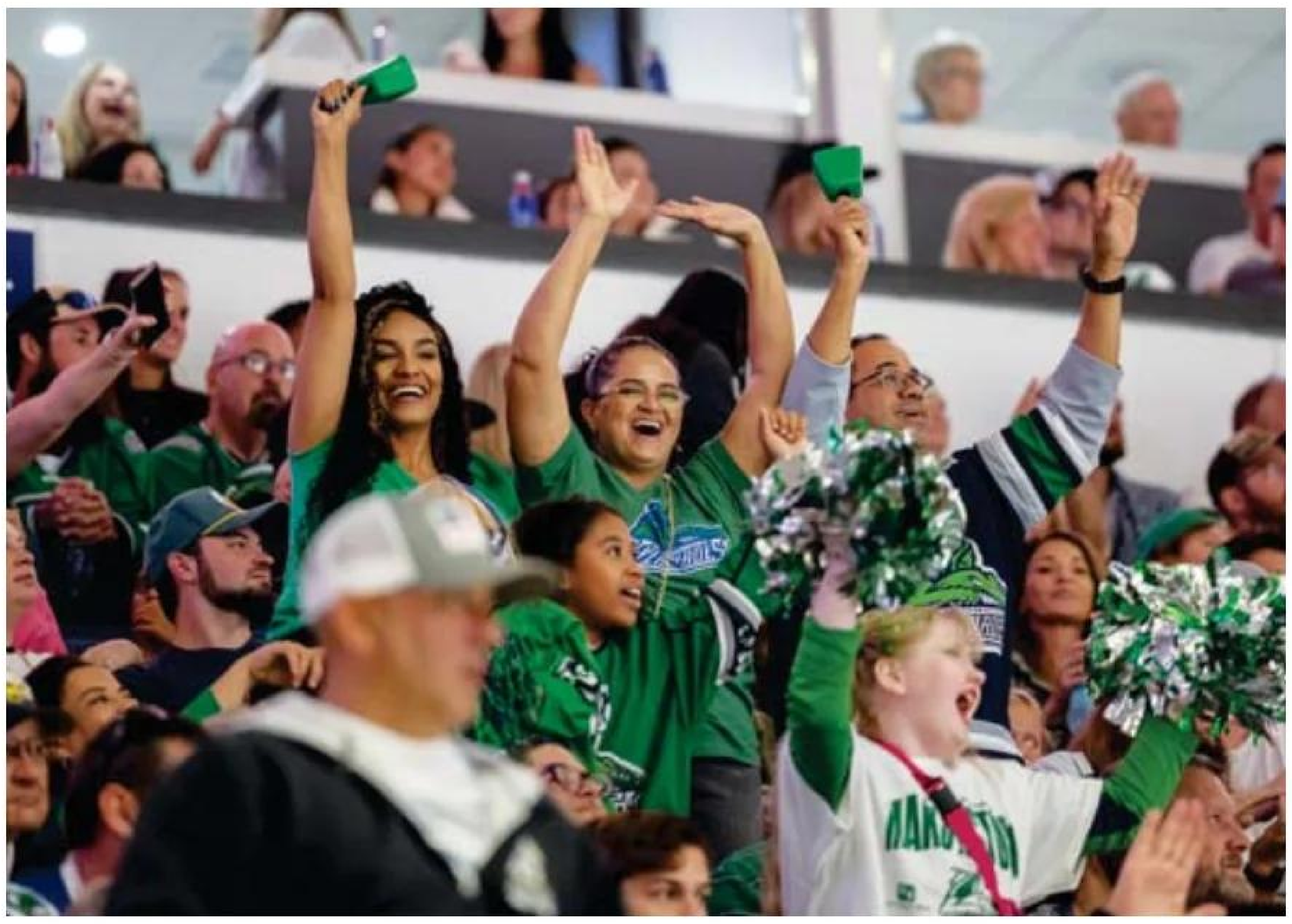
Ice skating is a popular choice as an athletic endeavor, whether it's hockey or figure skating. More than 11 million people in the United States participated in skating in one year alone. It offers several health benefits, including a chance to build strength and increase flexibility, endurance, and balance. Plus, it provides a chance to socialize—on and off the ice. Although Southwest Florida may be better known for its warm-weather sports such as swimming, tennis, and boating, there are a few places to skate or watch a hockey game.

Hertz Arena in Estero is home of the men's professional minor-league Florida Everblades hockey team. The hockey team plays a 72-game regular-season schedule from October through April, so there are plenty of chances to catch a game.

Not only is it exciting to watch an Everblades game, but there's also plenty of other fun to be had on game nights. Promo nights are regular events, such as Circus Night on January 3, Star Wars Night on January 18, and Affiliation Night on January 31, celebrating the team's new partnership with the St. Louis Blues NHL team. Check the online calendar for more events.

Besides that, Swampee, the beloved alligator mascot, adds to the fun as he interacts with the crowds. The official ice girls and dance team—the Everbabes—participate in promotions and intermission games, as well as cheering the Everblades on.

Fans can check out Breakaway Sports Pub inside the arena on the upper level, where they "can eat a great meal with a great view of the game. The pub is open to the public during all home games," says Sam Shapiro, PR, media, and communications manager. The game menu includes appetizers, salads, burgers, chicken, baskets, and pizza.



The Everblades have a loyal fan base and a festive atmosphere.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF HERTZ ARENA

Friends, family, or solo skaters can enjoy recreational skating at Hertz Arena. Rental skates available.

Also at the arena are recreational rinks offering public skating with laser-light shows. Learn-to-skate classes, youth hockey, adult hockey, and figure skating are all available. No gear? No worries. Hockey and figure-skate rentals range from size 8 (child) to size 14 (adult). The ice rinks are on the colder side to keep the ice frozen, so wear high socks and long-sleeved shirts, pants, jackets, and gloves. Protective padding, such as knee pads, elbow pads, and helmets, should also be considered.

Plus, the arena offers other events such as the Harlem Globetrotters on January 9, the rock band Styx on January 10, and comedian Jay Leno on February 6. Parking fees apply to all events at Hertz Arena.

Ice skaters and hockey players can also check out the Fort Myers Skatium, an ice-skating arena, gymnasium, and fitness center all under one roof.

“Whether you are a beginner or experienced skater, the Skatium has a program to enjoy,” says Heidi Haas, Skatium manager. “And, whether you are coming to enjoy our public session, watch hockey, or enjoy one of our Skatium programs, fun can always be found on the ice.”

Indeed, the Skatium offers an array of programs for all ages. They include learn-to-play hockey for new, aspiring players, and the growing youth recreational hockey program, as well as the USA Skating Academy and public skating lessons. The Skatium has added an Aspire program for skaters who are looking to further their skating knowledge in an advanced program.

“For the grown-ups, we have adult hockey teams and drop-in hockey sessions, and adult figure skating lessons,” adds Haas.

New skater Anthony Abernathy readies for his ice session.

Skate rentals for hockey and figure skating and a hockey pro shop are on-site. The concession stand offers snacks and drinks such as pizza and hot chocolate. Parking is free. Check the schedule as the rink closes for public skating during games.

“Please check out our recreational partners for their offerings: Florida Eels Junior Hockey Club, Florida Warriors Hockey travel program, and the City of Palms Figure Skating Club,” says Haas.

The Fort Myers Skatium also offers indoor roller hockey, soccer, volleyball, and basketball.

Ann Marie O’Phelan is a Southwest Florida resident and a regular contributor to TOTI Media.

IF YOU GO
Fort Myers Skatium
2250 Broadway, Fort Myers
239-321-7510; cityftmyers.com/skatium

Hertz Arena
11000 Everblades Parkway, Estero
239-948-7825; hertzarena.com

TOP PHOTO COURTESY OF HERTZ ARENA; BOTTOM PHOTO COURTESY OF THE CITY OF FORT MYERS

BY BETH LUBERECKI

STORAGE WITH STYLE

California Closets Southwest Florida helps local homeowners bring order to their lives

California Closets Southwest Florida has been helping local residents from Port Charlotte to Marco Island organize and beautify their homes since 1988. While closets are of course a specialty, the company also helps clients bring order and functionality to kitchens, baths, garages, and home offices.

"What we always say is that time is a nonrenewable resource," says Heather Woods-Elya, partner and vice president of sales and marketing at California Closets Southwest Florida. "So we're out here organizing lives in a way that gives clients time, whether they're able to take one less step to go get their clothing for the day or see something because we've lighted the closet in a certain way."

Every project the company works on is a custom plan created by the designer and client. "People save their whole lives for their dream closet or office or garage, and it's really important to us to make sure that investment is sound," says Woods-Elya. "We hope clients walk away saying they feel so happy with the project, they felt heard, and they come back for more."

When they do, California Closets Southwest Florida will be ready—especially since the company is opening a new 40,000-square-foot manufacturing and headquarters facility in the Alico Trade Center in January, and a fourth showroom is anticipated in Charlotte County in 2025. "We have a lot of plans for growing our footprint within the community," says Woods-Elya.

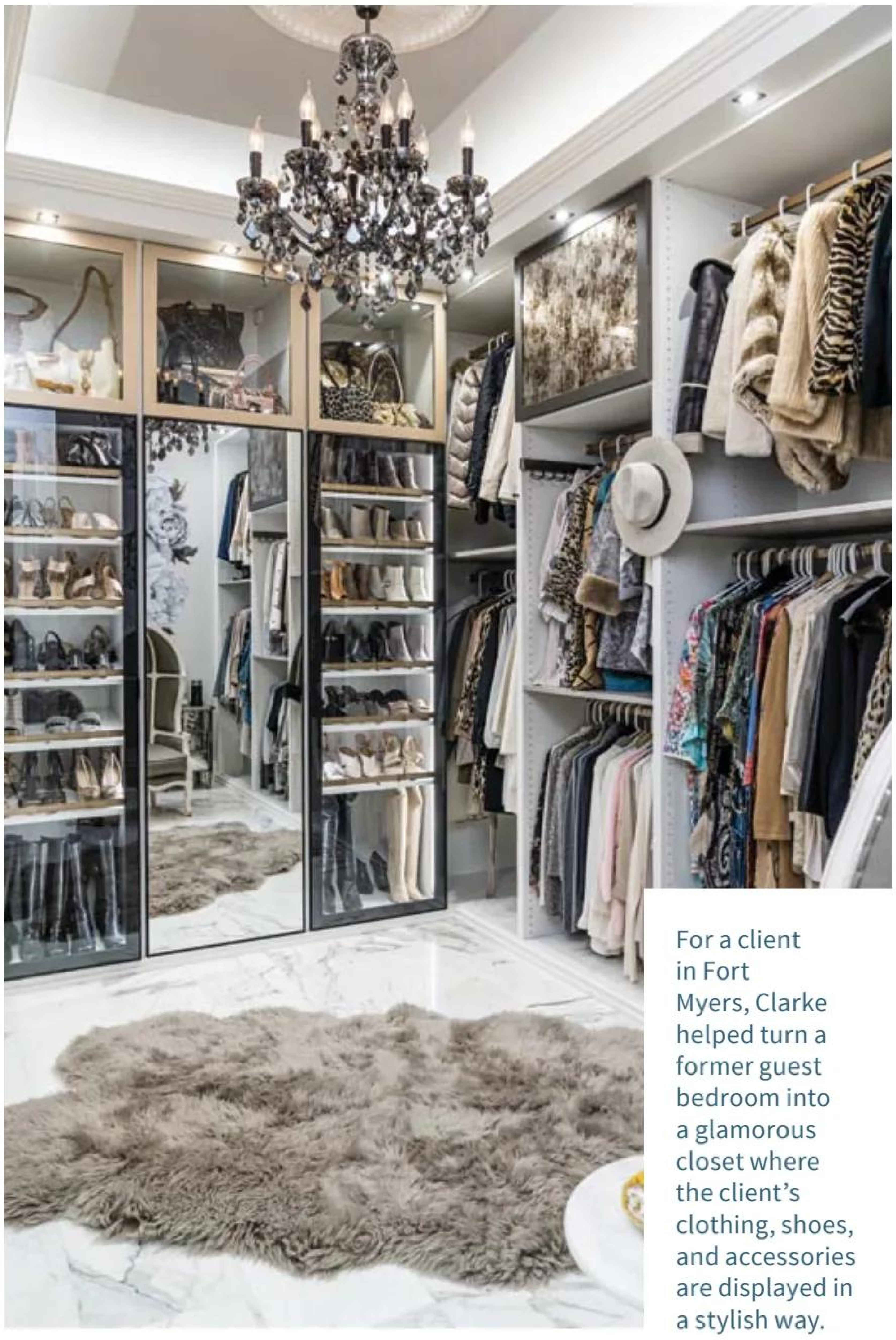
We recently talked with Candice Clarke, a design consultant for California Closets Southwest Florida, about some of her noteworthy projects that showcase the kind of work the company can do for clients. Read on for Clarke's insight on some of the challenges she tackled for clients and the solutions that combine style and function.

Client Kristin Purcell, cofounder of Estero-based homeware, candle, and gift business Henro Company, wanted her pantry to complement her existing kitchen design. Choosing cabinet and drawer fronts and hardware in the same style and color as the kitchen makes the new pantry feel like it has been there from the beginning.

The original plan called for artwork on the pantry's back wall, but Clarke opted instead to install rift white oak floating shelves, which create an attractive focal point and still offer storage in an area where installing cabinetry wasn't an easy option. "The floating shelves just gave that perfect little icing on the cake," says Clarke.

ALL PHOTOS ARE COURTESY OF CALIFORNIA CLOSETS SOUTHWEST FLORIDA

To hide a frequently used ice machine in the Purcells' pantry, Clarke included an appliance garage with pocket doors that can slide out of the way when open. "It makes it a more workable space than just having two large doors sitting there," says Clarke.

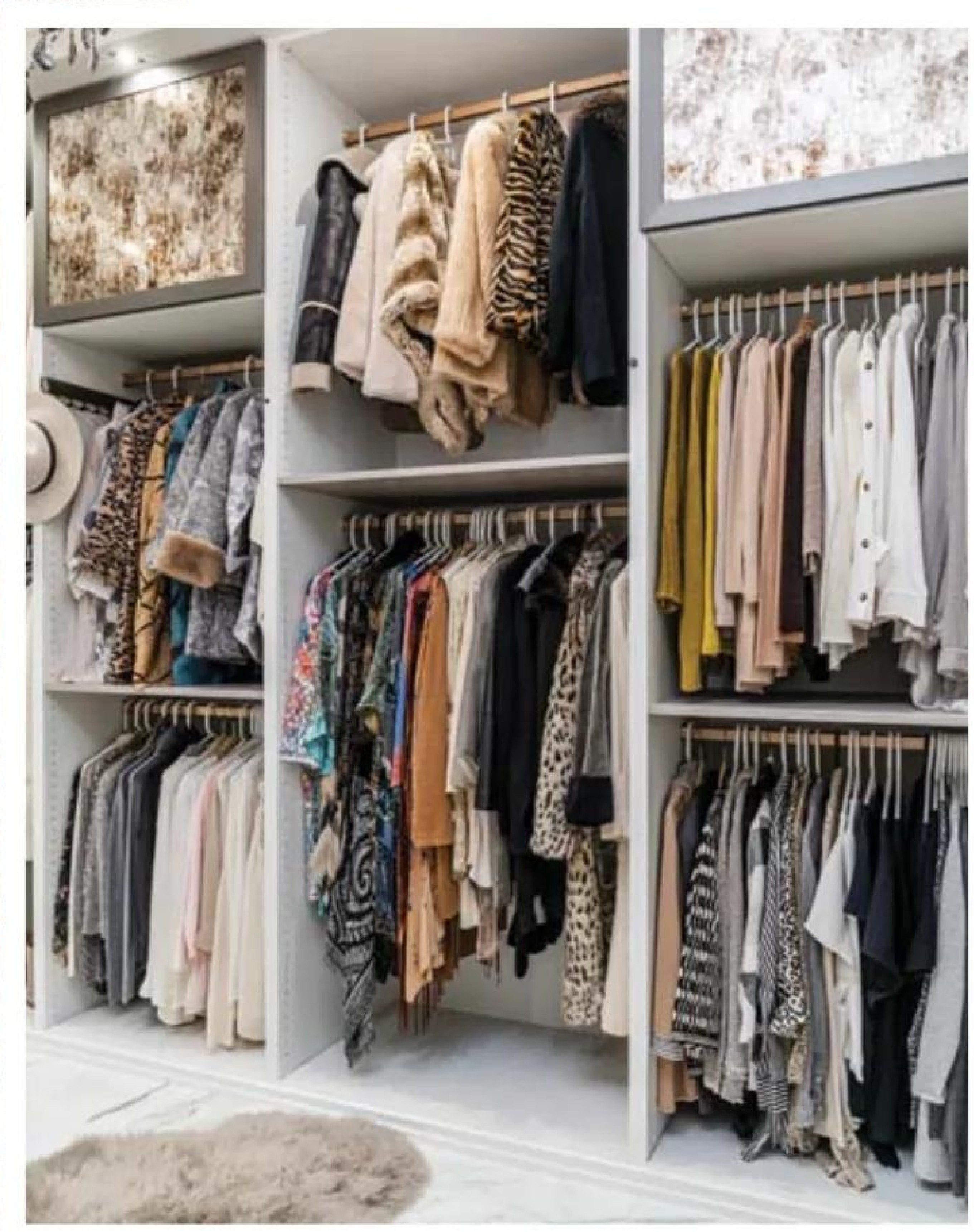


For a client in Fort Myers, Clarke helped turn a former guest bedroom into a glamorous closet where the client's clothing, shoes, and accessories are displayed in a stylish way.

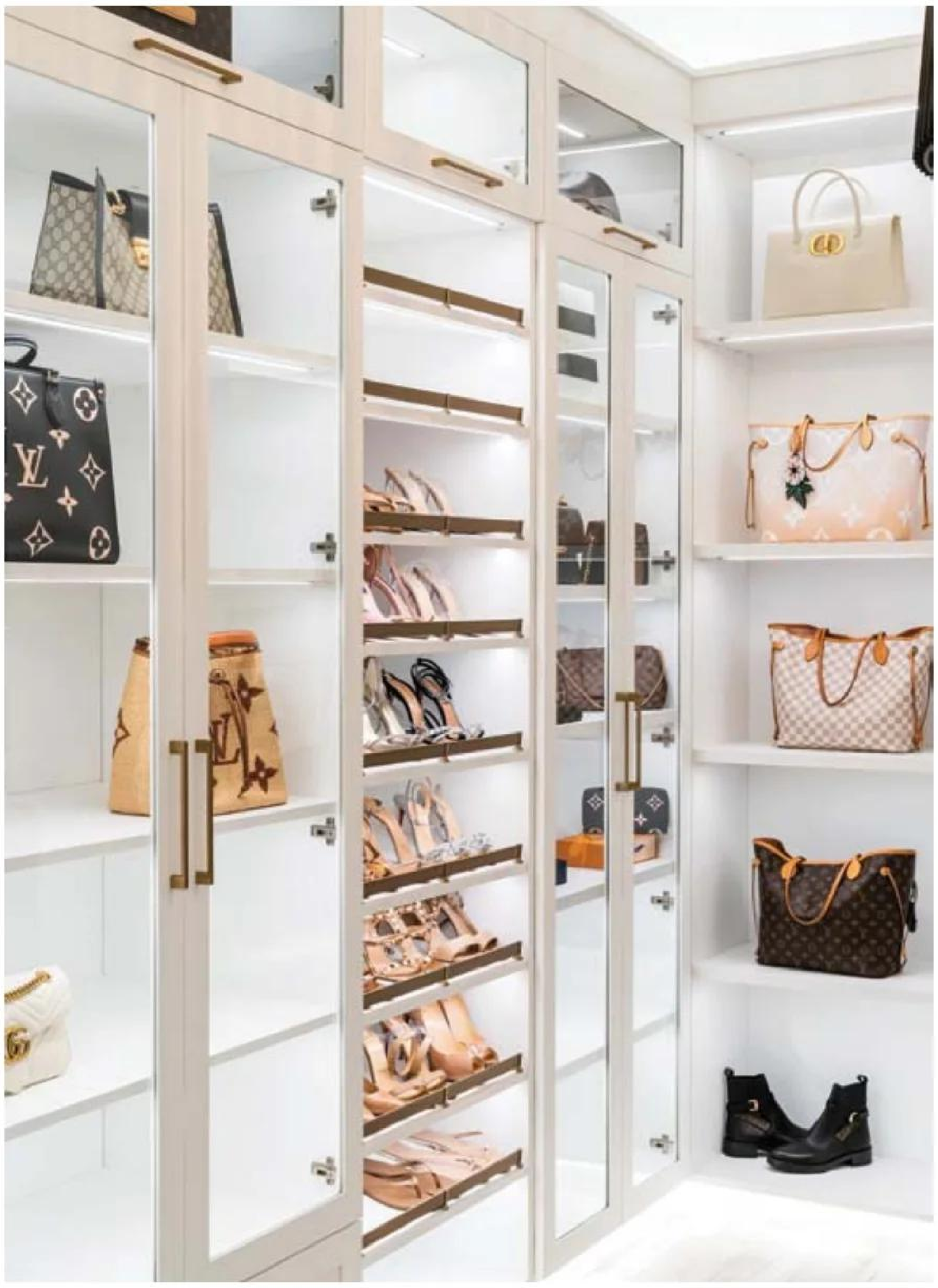
The client is an early riser and wanted to have a space in her condo where she could enjoy a morning beverage without disturbing her partner. "The vibe was for it to be a luxe and relaxed space where she could enjoy a cup of coffee while looking at her beautiful items," says Clarke.

Clarke created what she calls a "show stopper" of space for a client in Buckingham. Both the client and her husband have additional closet areas where they store their everyday and special occasion clothing. But this space was designed as "a boutique showroom of the client's curated items for her friends to just come in and have fun and try on things," says Clarke. The client's husband installed a sound system, which along with a bar, coffee maker and wine cooler, creates "such a fun and beautiful setup," adds Clarke.

By spending time with the client in the showroom, Clarke could show her different options for finishes and materials. The closet design features three different metals—black, gold, and graphite—along with various finishes for the cabinetry. "It probably wouldn't have happened without time in the showroom," says Clarke. "It has to be done in a way where it makes sense. It has to be done right, or else it just doesn't work."



In a closet where clothing, shoes, and accessories are on display, a sense of cohesiveness makes a big impact. "I love how her clothes coordinate," says Clarke. "The client was liking certain things and no wonder she did, because her wardrobe literally coordinates with the closet."



The client has a lot of purses, handbags, and footwear that she wanted to store in an eye-catching way. "She has great style, and loves luxury and designer clothes and shoes," says Clarke. "She wanted to display her purses on the left and right like that because that is what you see when you first walk into the closet."

When coming up with a closet design to store and display shoes, it's vital to take inventory first. "Heels take up a lot more space than ballet slippers," says Clarke. In this case, the client had a mix of heels and flats but plenty of space to play with in the closet, so Clarke went with fixed shelving for shoes. In other situations, adjustable shelving could be a better fit.

Lighting and glass doors showcase what's on display and help the client see her options. When planning out storage for purses and handbags, it's important to assess the bags' sizes and handles to ensure there's the right amount of space for each item.

Beth Luberecki is a Nokomis, Florida–based freelance writer who's a frequent contributor to TOTI Media. Learn more about her at bethluberecki.com.

IF YOU GO
California Closets Southwest Florida
239-694-8100; locations.californiaclosets.com/fl/southwest-florida
Three local showrooms:

- 6891 Daniels Pkwy., #135, Fort Myers
- 7729 Collier Blvd., Suite #503, Naples
- 2367 Vanderbilt Beach Rd., Suite #810, Naples

BY BETH LUBERECKI

Burrowing owl in Cape Coral

FOR THE BIRDS

Annual Burrowing Owl Festival celebrates the city's cutest winged creatures

Cape Coral has plenty of human residents living within its more than 100 square miles. But in the second-largest city by land area in the state of Florida, it's often the tiniest of inhabitants that draw folks from far and wide.

Cape Coral is home to the largest population of the Florida species of the burrowing owl (*Athene cunicularia floridana*) in the state. These diminutive creatures, weighing in at under nine ounces and standing no more than 11 inches tall, were drawn to all the open land in the city when it was first developed in the late 1950s.

"The wide-open spaces with sandy soil that resulted from the development in the '50s and '60s happened to leave a really nice environment for burrowing owls, and they've flourished here," says Janet Windisch, corresponding secretary for Cape Coral Friends of Wildlife (CCFW).

Now some 5,000 burrowing owls live in Cape Coral, digging their own burrows or using those dug by gopher tortoises and other animals. You can often find them in spots around the Cape Coral-Lee County Public Library and Pelican Baseball Complex, as well as in many residents' front yards. "You can see them just driving or walking down the street," says Windisch.

Burrowing Owl Festival
Wildlife and Environmental Exposition
Cape Coral

Top: The annual Burrowing Owl Festival celebrates Cape Coral's beloved birds. Bottom: The festival features crafts for kids and other activities for residents of all ages.

TOP PHOTO BY JASON BOECKMAN/COURTESY OF LEE COUNTY VISITOR & CONVENTION BUREAU; BOTTOM PHOTOS COURTESY OF CAPE CORAL FRIENDS OF WILDLIFE

Cape Coral nature photographer Susan Oliver has captured many images of the cute critters.

PHOTO COURTESY OF SUSAN OLIVER

Some 5,000 burrowing owls live in Cape Coral, digging their own burrows or using those dug by gopher tortoises and other animals.

Both residents and visitors are completely charmed by the critters, which are popular photo subjects in the city. “They’re just so cute,” says nature photographer Susan Oliver, who has lived in Cape Coral for 10 years. “People love the burrowing owls. I’m part of the Harbour View Gallery in Cape Coral, and customers always come in looking for owl pictures and cards.”

So it’s not surprising that Cape Coral Friends of Wildlife hosts an annual festival to celebrate the beloved birds. The 23rd annual Burrowing Owl Festival Wildlife & Environmental Expo takes place this year on February 22, 2025, at Rotary Park Environmental Center.

“It started out as an opportunity to educate the community and celebrate the burrowing owls in Cape Coral,” says Windisch. “It coincides with the beginning of nesting season, when we’re starting to see chicks pop up out of the burrows. And the festival’s just grown since then. It’s a great time for the community to come together to celebrate not only our burrowing owls but all the beautiful wildlife in Cape Coral.”

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The 2025 event will feature kids' activities and crafts, exhibits and discussions by conservation and wildlife organizations, arts and crafts vendors, and tours of the Tom Allen Memorial Butterfly House at the park. There are no burrowing owls at Rotary Park where the festival takes place, but festivalgoers can join a bus tour that travels to neighborhoods where the owls are commonly spotted. There's also a photography bus tour hosted by local birding experts; advance registration is required for that experience.

A silent auction at the festival plus another auction online helps raise money for CCFW and its efforts to purchase land for conservation through sister organization Cape Coral Wildlife Trust. Those efforts have become even more important as Cape Coral gets more developed.

"We already own over eight acres of land in Cape Coral," says Windisch. "And we're continuing to purchase it as fast as we can. It's a race against time."

Burrowing owls have been designated a threatened species by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. There's a Cape Coral city ordinance protecting the birds, plus permitting procedures that must be followed during the building process to protect existing burrows. But as empty lots get developed, the owls keep losing spots for building their own homes.

BURROWING OWLS DO'S AND DON'TS

Visit the Cape Coral Friends of Wildlife website to find burrowing-owl etiquette tips to view the birds in a respectful way. It is illegal to harass burrowing owls, which includes offering food or trying to catch them. Keep a distance of at least 20 feet between yourself and the owls so as not to disrupt their daily activities.

This is especially important during nesting season, which runs from February 15 through July 10. Many of the city's burrows are marked with PVC pipes to help observers respect the owls' space. Burrowing owls are active during the day, and you might see them sitting in front of their burrows or on nearby perches. Male owls can often be observed standing guard over burrows during nesting season, and chicks start emerging from the burrows at around 10 days old.

CCFW recommends the first or last light of day as the best time for photographers to seek out the birds. "I use a really long lens because I don't want to get too close to the owls; you can tell when they get nervous," says local nature photographer Susan Oliver. "Most of the time if I take a picture, it's usually from my car. My lens is long enough that it doesn't bother them at all."

Top: Burrowing owl mascot Athene helps show off artwork featured at a past festival's silent auction. Left: Burrowing owl

TOP PHOTO COURTESY OF CAPE CORAL FRIENDS OF WILDLIFE; BOTTOM PHOTO BY JASON BOECKMAN/COURTESY OF LEE COUNTY VISITOR & CONVENTION BUREAU

As empty lots get developed, the owls keep losing spots for building their own homes.

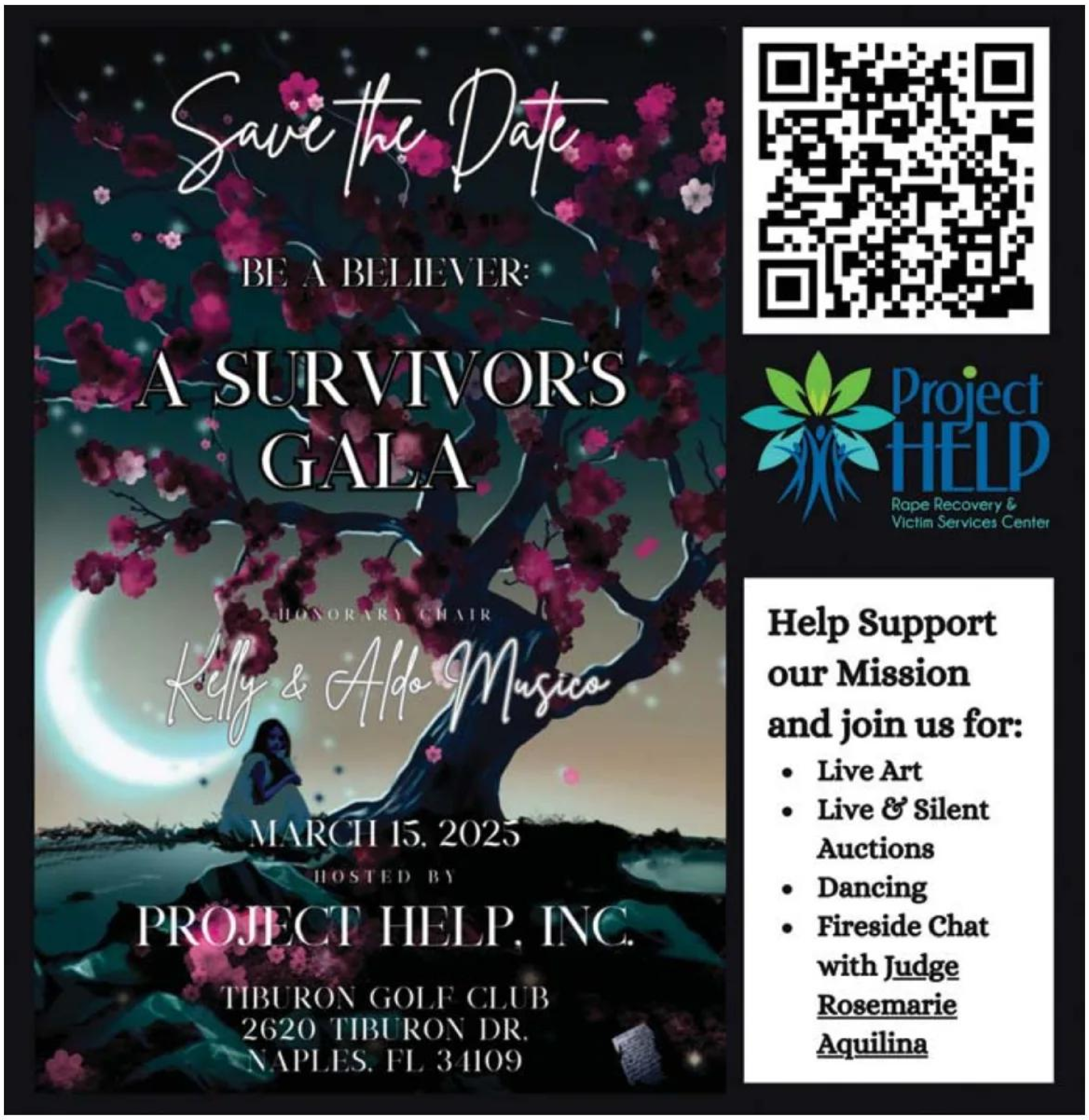
“One thing residents can do is build a starter burrow in their yard,” says Windisch. “We have instructions on our website for doing that in the right way. It helps owls get a burrow going, and it’s one of the ways we’ve identified to ensure the long-term viability of burrowing owls in Cape Coral.”

After all, opportunities to connect with nature make a community a better place to live. “I think people are starting to become more interested in being out in Mother Nature,” says Oliver, who has provided artwork for the festival’s raffles. “My corporate career was really stressful, and just being out in Mother Nature has always been something that I like to do. I think all communities need to have that; people need to find a way to go out and have a place to walk their dog and just be outside.”

“Lots of people come to Florida because of the beautiful weather,” says Windisch. “They love the outdoors, they love nature, and it brings joy and happiness to the community. It also brings ecotourism to Cape Coral; people come to Cape Coral just to see the burrowing owls and our other wildlife. I believe we need to share this Earth with the other creatures who inhabit it with us. We can coexist together in a happy fashion.”

Beth Luberecki is a Nokomis, Florida–based freelance writer who’s a frequent contributor to TOTI Media. Learn more about her at bethluberecki.com.

IF YOU GO
Burrowing Owl Festival
Rotary Park Environmental Center
5505 Rose Garden Road, Cape Coral
239-549-4606; ccfriendsofwildlife.org/programs/burrowing-owl-festival/



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BY BETH LUBERECKI

OFF THE PAGE

Annual reading festival brings well-known authors to downtown Fort Myers

Calling all bookworms: The 26th annual Southwest Florida Reading Festival will take place March 1, 2025, at Fort Myers Regional Library in the River District, and you're definitely going to want to be a part of it.

This year's lineup includes a number of well-known authors across many different genres. Best-selling author and "the official storyteller of Christmas" Debbie Macomber returns to the festival for the third time. If you're a fan of her books, you'll likely also enjoy hearing from Jenny Colgan (author of such titles as *Christmas at the Island Hotel* and *The Summer Skies*), Viola Shipman (whose books include *The Secret of Snow* and *A Wish for Winter*), and Sarah MacLean (who's known for several historical romance series).

If thrillers are more to your liking, the festival will also feature Reed Farrel Coleman (best-selling author of 31 novels, including six in Robert B. Parker's Jesse Stone series) and Alison Gaylin (who writes her own twisty tales and for Robert B. Parker's Sunny Randall series). Neuroscientist and author Lisa Genova (whose novel *Still Alice* was adapted into a film starring Julianne Moore) is also part of the lineup.

For kids, author and illustrator Molly Idle will be on stage discussing her books, including the Caldecott Honor-winning *Flora and the Flamingo* and her Rex series. Megan McDonald will also be there to talk about her popular Judy Moody and Stink book series.

Every child and teen who attends the Southwest Florida Reading Festival gets to choose a free book to take home.

NAACP Image Award-nominated young adult author Elise Bryant and YA and adult romcom author Lynn Painter share the stage at the 2024 festival.

"There will really be something for everybody," says Melissa Baker, manager of programming and community outreach for the Lee County Library System and the festival coordinator. "It's a phenomenal lineup, and I'm really excited to share it with the community."

We spoke with Baker recently to learn what attendees can expect from the 2025 festival and why it's such a popular local event.

TOTI Media: Why do you think the Southwest Florida Reading Festival is an event that keeps growing and going strong year after year?

Melissa Baker: It's been a really wonderful thing that the library system has been able to present and put on for the community for all these years. I'm biased of course, but on festival day there's so much positive energy. It's such a happy event that doesn't cost anything to come and enjoy. There are just so many smiles; the authors are happy, the attendees are happy, and it's just really a feel-good event.

I think part of our success is because we've built relationships with publicists and publishing companies and authors who have had positive experiences with us, and they tell their author friends. We stand by our reputation with the publishers, and that brings in talent year after year. At the end of the day, you've got to have great authors to share with the community to bring in the big crowds.

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE SOUTHWEST FLORIDA READING FESTIVAL.

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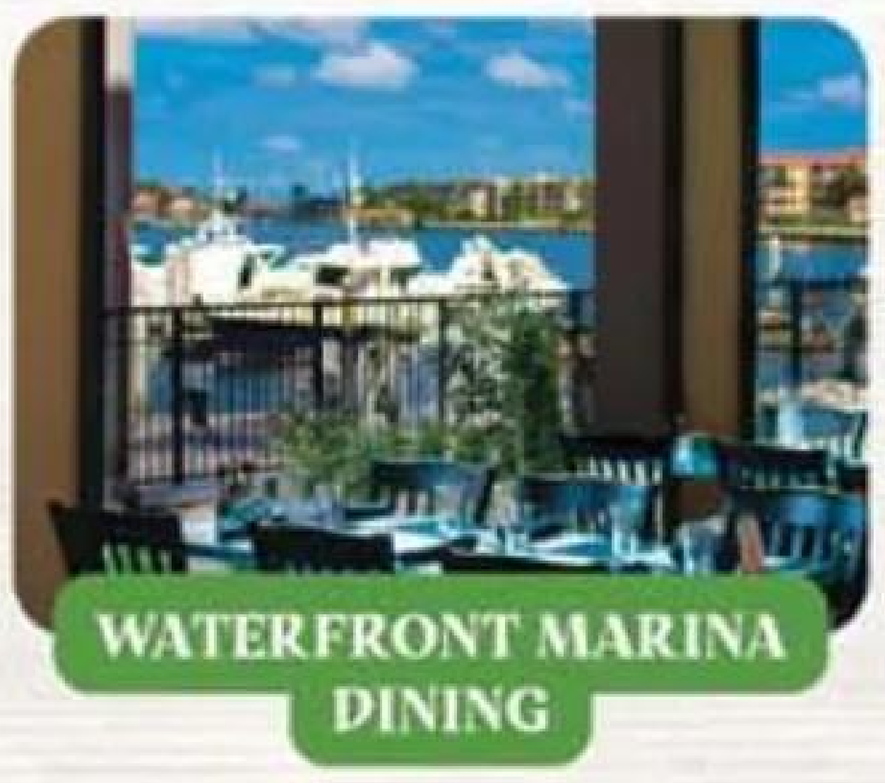

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WATERFRONT DINING

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(941) 770-3337

Fort Myers
14040 McGregor Blvd.
(239) 689-5474

Naples
8777 Tamiami Trail N.
(239) 880-3337

Marco Island
760 N. Collier Blvd., Ste. 105
(239) 235-7497

Lakewood Ranch
1540 Lakefront Dr.
(941) 877-2234

Reservations Strongly Recommended

DEEPLAGOON.COM

Children's book author Kamilla Benko, children's book illustrator Zachariah OHora, and young adult author Sara Holland sign books at a past festival.

TOTI Media: Every child and teen who attends the festival gets to choose one free book to take home. Why is that an important element of the festival?

MB: There's something about owning a book and having a book you can call your own. We've started libraries for kids who have been coming to the festival year after year; they have a whole collection of books they've gotten from our festival. We know that reading is so important, especially for youth. Planting these early seeds of literacy and a love of reading will have cascading effects on their lives.

TOTI Media: What else should young attendees look forward to this year?

MB: We'll have a big kids' craft tent and teen crafts, fun things for the kids to enjoy in addition to hearing the stories on stage. There's something so special about meeting an author or illustrator, getting your book signed, and hearing the stories behind the stories. I think that's a big part of making those connections; you remember when you got to meet that author. It sticks with you, and it builds that foundation of literacy.

TOTI Media: What about adult attendees—what should they expect?

MB: We feature authors who tend to be *New York Times* best-selling authors, bigger authors you would see on our library shelves or on sale at the airport. We tend to have those kinds of big authors presenting on stage. We also like to support our local author community, because every author is starting somewhere. We've already signed on the Gulf Coast Writers Association. So you get to meet authors in your own backyard and find out how to become an author. It helps people tap into their own creativity that way.

TOTI Media: Why is reading something to celebrate?

MB: It keeps your brain active. Reading builds neuroplasticity and can prevent cognitive decline. Reading's good for everybody, and it's totally healthy for your brain. We don't really have to sell it too hard for our adult population, who are usually our library patrons. But we always do sign up new library card holders every year, because there are always new people moving into our area.

The community has grown tremendously in the past several years, and people are still finding out about us and discovering what the festival has to offer. They're usually super excited to have such a high-quality festival right here in our community. You don't have to go all the way to the other coast; we have a really great amazing festival right here in Southwest Florida.

TOTI Media: What does it take to put on the festival year after year?

MB: We're so grateful for our sponsors. That's really what helps sustain this event long term. I work with sponsors and community donors to fund this event so it truly is something special.

This year we received a grant through Florida Humanities, so that's a new layer of funding we've been able to tap into for this event. Books-A-Million is the official bookseller. For the books purchased at the festival, a percentage of that comes back to the festival. So when you buy a book, you're also supporting the festival. Suncoast Credit Union supports the free book for every child and teen.

TOTI Media: What about volunteers?

MB: It takes a village. I want to say we have somewhere around 100 or so extra workers working on event day. So if you are interested in volunteering, we love to see that. Go to leelibrary.net/volunteer in January or February to see Reading Festival volunteer opportunities listed there. You can also volunteer at the library all the time; there are almost always opportunities for volunteering in the library system.

Beth Luberecki is a Nokomis, Florida–based freelance writer who's a frequent contributor to TOTI Media. Learn more about her at bethluberecki.com.

IF YOU GO

For more information about the free Southwest Florida Reading Festival, visit readfest.org. Download the festival app to have event schedule and other info at your fingertips.

If you're looking for your next great read, the Lee County Library System has 13 branches across the area (leegov.com/library/branches):

Bonita Springs Public Library
10560 Reynolds Street, Bonita Springs
239-533-4860

Cape Coral-Lee County Public Library
921 SW 39th Terrace, Cape Coral
239-533-4500

Captiva Memorial Library
11560 Chapin Lane, Captiva
239-533-4890

Dunbar-Jupiter Hammon Public Library
3095 Blount Street, Fort Myers
239-533-4150

East County Regional Library
881 Gunnery Road N., Lehigh Acres
239-533-4200

Fort Myers Regional Library
2450 First Street, Fort Myers
239-533-4600

Johann Fust Community Library
1040 W. 10th Street, Boca Grande
941-964-2488

Lakes Regional Library
15290 Bass Road, Fort Myers
239-533-4000

North Fort Myers Public Library
2001 N. Tamiami Trail, North Fort Myers
239-533-4320

Northwest Regional Library
519 Chiquita Blvd. N., Cape Coral
239-533-4700

Pine Island Public Library
10701 Russell Road, Bokeelia
239-533-4350

Riverdale Public Library
2421 Buckingham Road, Fort Myers
239-533-4370

South County Regional Library
(temporary site)
18251 Three Oaks Pkwy., Fort Myers
239-533-4400

If you're a bookstore fan and want to build your home library, here are some local booksellers we recommend:

Flutterbuy Books and More
840 SW 4th St., Unit 7, Cape Coral
239-789-6619;
flutterbuybooksandmore.com

Lost World Books
1815 Fowler St. #3, Fort Myers
458-209-1512; lostwb.com

MacIntosh Books & Paper
1620 Periwinkle Way, Sanibel
239-472-1447; macintoshbooks.com

Blinking Owl Books in downtown Fort Myers sustained damage from Hurricane Helene. For more info about pop-up events, reopening plans, and ways to support rebuilding efforts, visit blinkingowlbooks.com.

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25091 Bernwood Drive #7 Bonita Springs

BY BETH LUBERECKI

BEAUTY TRENDS

Are you a lipstick lover or face-cream fanatic? Then you're in the right place. Every issue, we give you the lowdown on fabulous fragrances, luxurious lotions, must-have makeup, and everything in between.

Reduces Frizz
Glossy Shine
eva·nyc
Mane Magic
Nourishing
Hair Oil
Argan Oil
Coconut Oil
2 FL OZ | 60 ML

PURPOSEFUL PRODUCTS

Eva NYC cares about your hair and the planet. The certified B corporation, meaning it meets high standards of social and environmental performance, launched an electronic-hair-tools recycling program with TerraCycle, has been certified climate neutral, and uses sustainably sourced ingredients in its products. So you can feel good about reaching for the company's new Mane Magic Nourishing Hair Oil ($16). The multitasking, lightweight, nongreasy oil helps control frizz, add shine, and give hair a healthy look and feel. Find it and other Eva NYC products at local Walgreens, CVS, and Ulta Beauty stores.

PAULA'S CHOICE
SPF 50
5% Vitamin C
Sheer Moisturizer
WITH ALGAE AMINOS
All Skin Types

SUPERCHARGED SUN PROTECTION

Buzzy skincare brand Paula's Choice has a new launch to get excited about. Its 5% Vitamin C Sheer Moisturizer SPF 50 ($45) provides broad-spectrum sun protection that's supercharged by vitamin C. Ingredients like acetyl zingerone and algae-derived amino acids help brighten and hydrate skin, and the weightless sheer formulation works for all skin types and tones. Pick up a tube from paulaschoice.com or at local Sephora stores.

BUILD ON IT

If you appreciate when your makeup works hard for you, you'll want to check out Naked Sundays' new BeautyScreen SPF50 Peptide Foundation Tint ($38). The lightweight formulation comes in 13 buildable shades for a natural finish that helps even out your skin tone. Non-nano mineral SPF50 protects skin from UVA, UVB, blue light, and infrared damage, while ingredients like peptides, polyglutamic acid, niacinamide, and vegan squalane help soothe, moisturize, and strengthen skin. Find your perfect shade at us.nakedsundays.com.

NAKED SUNDAYS
SPF 50

VISOR
CLEAR
Daily Oil-Free Sunscreen with Hyaluronic Acid + Vitamin C
Broad Spectrum UVA/UVB Protection
40 SPF
6.67 fl oz / 200 ml

A CLEAR CHOICE

Hate the heavy feel of many sunscreens out there? Visor Skincare has you covered. Its Daily Oil-Free Clear Sunscreen ($19-$32) offers an alcohol-free, fragrance-free, water-resistant formulation that goes on smoothly and absorbs quickly into your skin. In addition to providing broad-spectrum SPF 40 protection, the sunscreen also includes hyaluronic acid and vitamin C to brighten skin and combat the effects of aging. Find it at visorskincare.com.

During the inaugural Music Walk at McCollum Hall featuring the Night Market in November 2024, Brandon Roberston led his namesake quintet , along with the FGCU Jazz Ensemble, and the Naples Philharmonic Youth Jazz Orchestra in performances that included music from some of the legends who have performed at McCollum Hall.

THE BEAT GOES ON AT McCOLLUM HALL

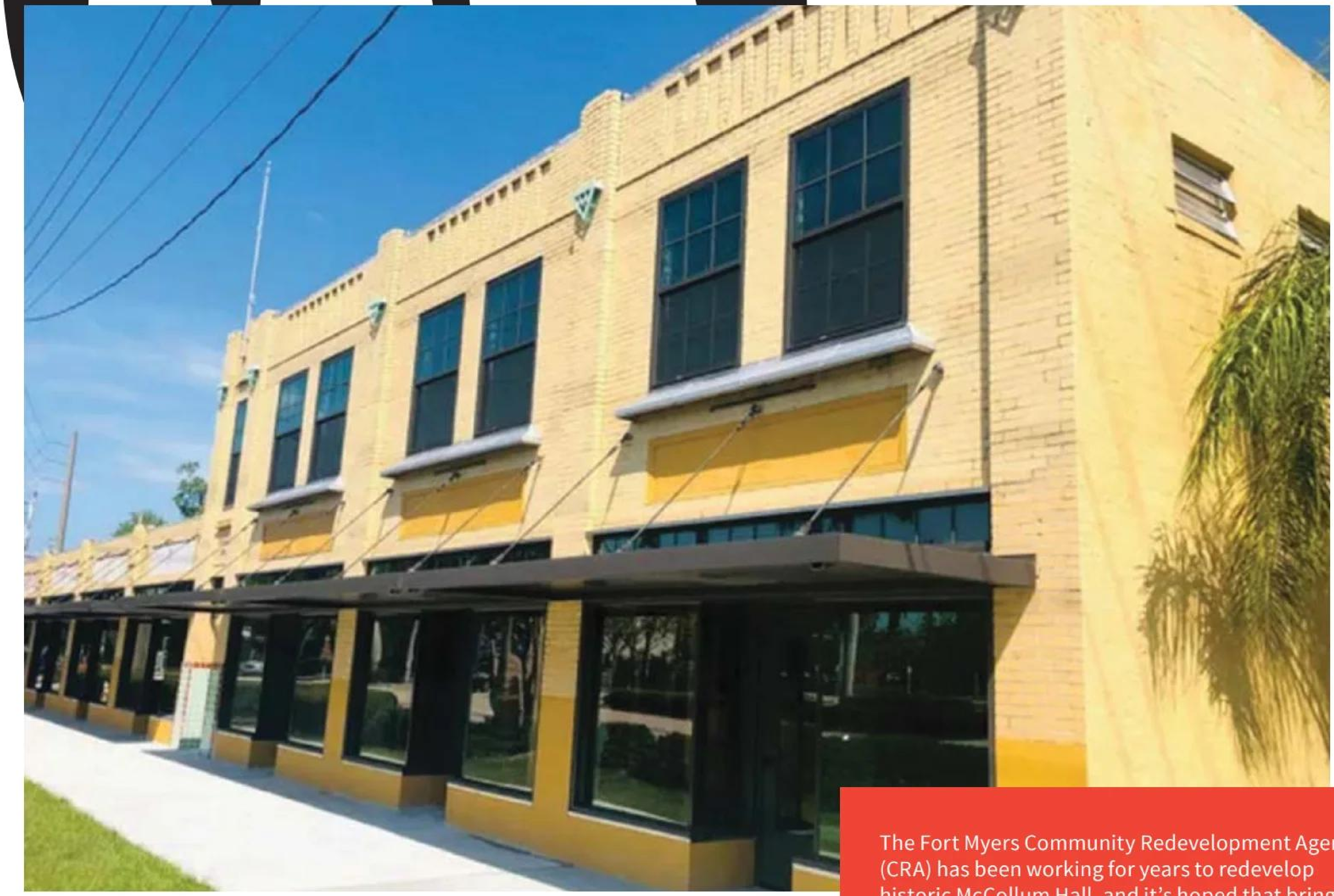
Music Walk and Night Market extend to historic Fort Myers site

BY BETH LUBERECKI

Since spring 2022, local community foundation Collaboratory had been hosting quarterly night markets at its downtown Fort Myers headquarters. Folks would gather there to shop from local vendors, listen to live music, and sample eats from area food trucks.

Starting with the November 2024 night market, the Fort Myers Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) has taken over the free event, moving the location and renaming it Music Walk at McCollum Hall featuring the Night Market. The spirit of the event remains the same, but its new home base helps CRA with its goal to redevelop and reinvigorate historic McCollum Hall, a landmark in the Dunbar community that was named to the National Park Service's National Register of Historic Places in April 2022 and is a site on Florida's Black Heritage Trail.

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE FORT MYERS COMMUNITY REDEVELOPMENT AGENCY (CRA)



The Fort Myers Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) has been working for years to redevelop historic McCollum Hall, and it's hoped that bringing the new Music Walk at McCollum Hall featuring the Night Market to the site will help with that goal.

"It seemed like the perfect match to bring an established night market that had music and supported local vendors together with the site," says Michele Hylton-Terry, executive director of the Fort Myers CRA. "McCollum Hall was really such a bright spot; it was a gem."

Clifford "Buck" McCollum Sr., a Black businessman and entrepreneur, and his wife, Gertrude, built McCollum Hall in 1938. It became both a centerpiece of the local Dunbar community and a popular stop for entertainers like Duke Ellington, Ella Fitzgerald, Louis Armstrong, Count Basie, B.B. King, Dizzy Gillespie, and Otis Redding.

Hylton-Terry has heard stories about the velvet rope that separated the races at the second-floor dance hall during the days of segregation. She's also been told that "when the music started playing, the velvet rope dropped away and no one cared," she says. "And so I always like to say integration started at McCollum Hall."

Though the big names who came to the upstairs dance hall got a lot of attention, the ground floor of the building was home to commercial establishments important to Dunbar residents, including a shoe store, barbershop, coffee shop, and grocery store. And the couple whose name was on the hall were ardent supporters of the community.

"They sponsored Little League and football teams, and different community organizations seemed to gather at that spot," says Hylton-Terry. "It truly was the heart of the community."

THE BUILDING HAD FALLEN INTO DISREPAIR BY THE TIME THE CRA PURCHASED IT IN 2008, AND ITS REDEVELOPMENT HASN'T BEEN EASY.

The building had fallen into disrepair by the time the CRA purchased it in 2008, and its redevelopment hasn't been easy. "We have made several attempts with multiple developers to get it going," says Hylton-Terry. "It is truly a project that you have to really have a commitment."

But Hylton-Terry thinks the CRA's current development partners, Alexander Goshen and Cornerstone Strategic Partners, will be the ones to get the project over the finish line. Their plan consists of a new mixed-use food hall called Thirty8 Collective (an homage to the year the hall was built) that could also include a small grocer and a new residential building named Thirty8 Flats.

"I think we're closer than ever," says Hylton-Terry. "They're making some headway… In the meantime, we're going to get people back at the hall through the Night Market, so that once it's opened up again, it'll be a natural thing."

Music Walk at McCollum Hall featuring the Night Market is an extension of the existing Music Walk that takes place on the third Friday of each month in the Fort Myers River District. The CRA provides a grant to the River District Alliance, which produces the Music Walk and Art Walk (on the first Friday of each month), and hopes that the new quarterly event draws Music Walk regulars to McCollum Hall and brings new people in to experience the Music Walk as a whole. Partners in the new event include the city of Fort Myers, River District Alliance, Lee County Black History Society, FGCU's Bower School of Music & the Arts, Thirty8 Collective, Collaboratory, and Lee Pitts Live.

The inaugural Music Walk at McCollum Hall featuring the Night Market in November included food trucks, merchants, and art vendors, along with musical performances by the Naples Philharmonic Youth Jazz Orchestra, FGCU Jazz Ensemble, and Brandon Robertson Quintet. Future dates for Music Walk at McCollum Hall will be February 21, May 16, and August 15, 2025. The February event will be held during Black History Month, so the CRA is hoping to add some special elements for that.

"We're working on getting some amazing musician talent to come through," says Hylton-Terry. "So people need to come check it out."

Beth Luberecki is a Nokomis, Florida–based freelance writer who's a frequent contributor to TOTI Media. Learn more about her at bethluberecki.com.

The second-floor dance hall was a popular spot during McCollum Hall's mid-20th-century heyday, attracting jazz and blues greats like Duke Ellington, Ella Fitzgerald, and Louis Armstrong.

IF YOU GO
McCollum Hall
2701 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd., Fort Myers
fortmyerscra.com/projects/mccollum-hall-restoration/

Connecting with Local Culture

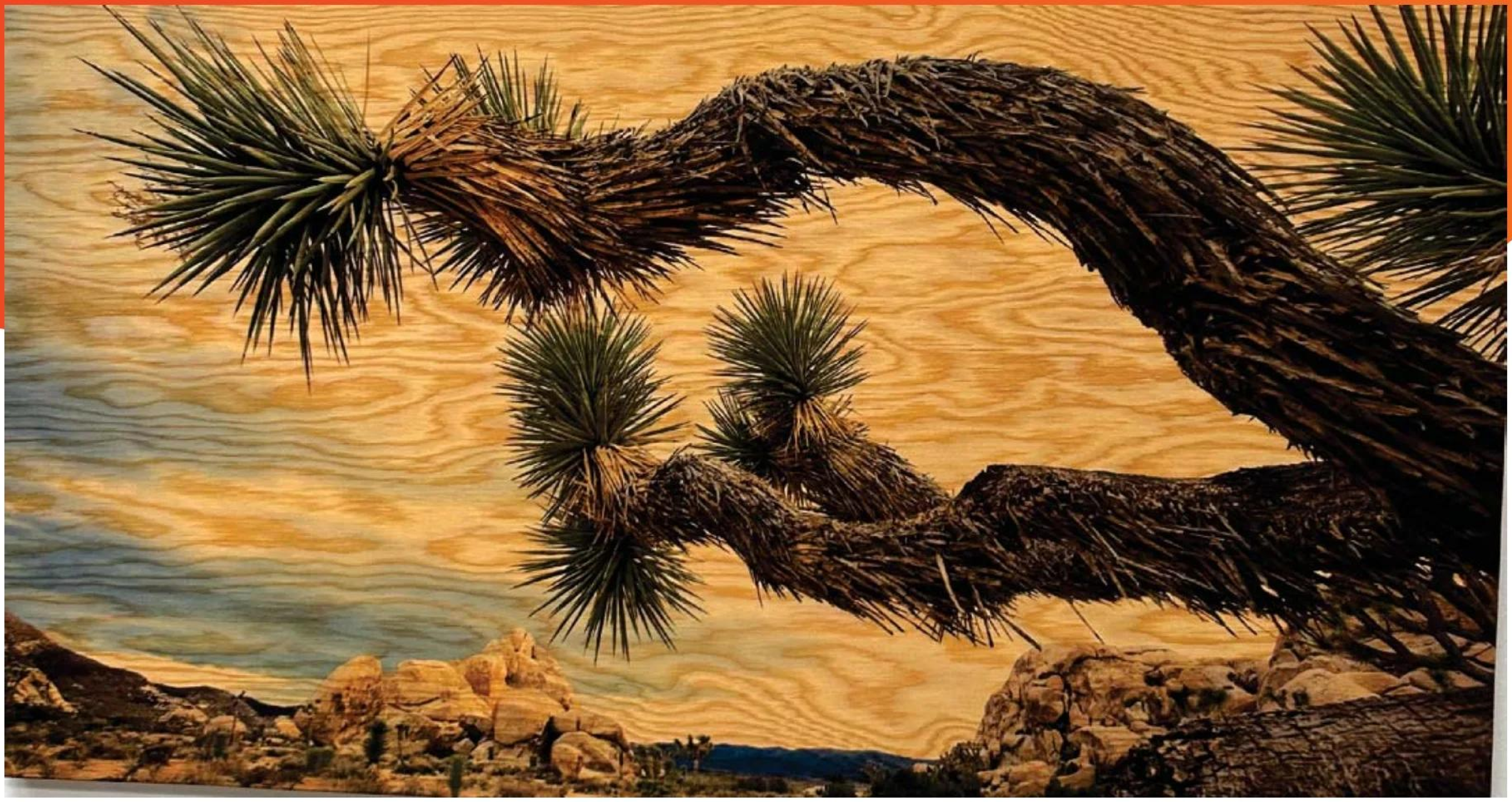
Port of Call Shopper helps travelers dig deeper into a destination

By Beth Luberecki

A representation of Mexican folk art found in Puerto Vallar

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF KATHY ANDERSON

In Puerto Vallarta, look for Huichol yarn and beaded art incorporating symbolic motifs from Huichol culture at spots like Tierra Huichol.



At Lancaster Wood Prints in Santa Barbara, digital images of California landscapes and other scenes are printed on pieces of pine or fir wood.

After retiring in 2020, Kathy Anderson and her husband took their years-long love of boating and the water to the next level, transitioning from their longtime Arizona home base to life on a motor yacht docked in San Diego. On dry land, retail and travel have also been longtime passions for Anderson, whose career included stints as a fashion director for Saks Fifth Avenue and marketing director for shopping-center developers.

Kathy Anderson's Port of Call Shopper website combines her love of travel, shopping, and boating to help travelers find authentic local goods and experiences.

In 1996, she founded a tourism marketing company that focused on developing tourism programs for shopping centers, retailers, and restaurants in popular travel destinations around the United States. Now she's combining all that experience in her latest venture: a website and blog called Port of Call Shopper (portofcallshopper.travel).

Through her site, she's helping travelers find authentic and locally made art, crafts, and other goods in seaports and waterfront destinations around the world. "I have never liked just shopping at the port stores cruise lines recommend," says Anderson, 67. "The traditional T-shirt shops have never been my thing either. I've always tried to look for the more cultural aspect of the merchandise that is available in a port, whether it be pottery or paintings or jewelry, something where that craft may have been handed down from generation to generation."

In the first year since her site launched, she has visited 26 ports in 10 countries. She has discovered pink sand jewelry and Gombey dolls in Bermuda, blown-glass sculpture in Vancouver, seascapes in Galveston, sail bags in Key West, and Huichol yarn paintings in Puerto Vallarta.

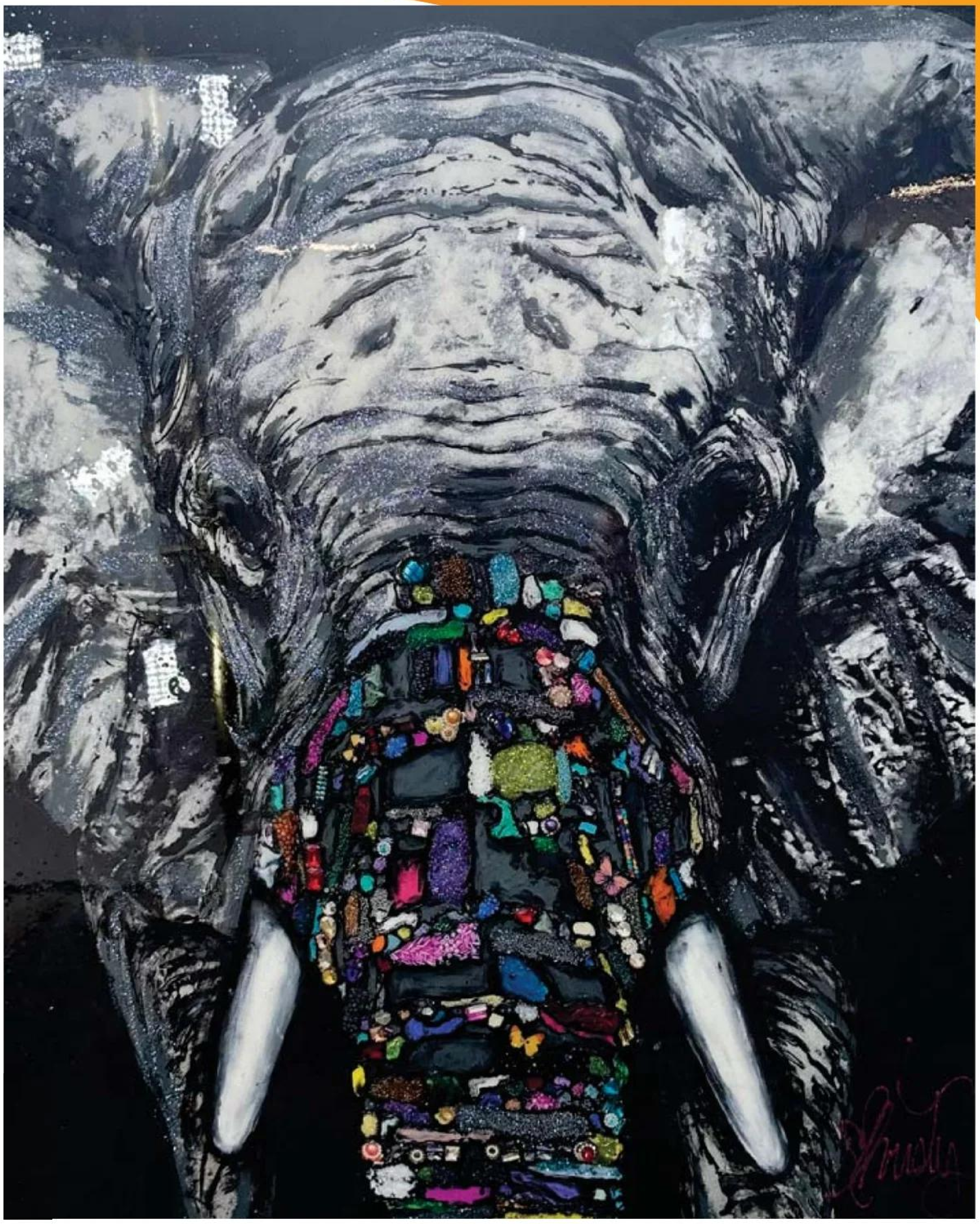
"I think it's fascinating not just to be able to purchase merchandise from that destination, but to try to seek out working studios to be able to see the artists and craftspeople at work," says Anderson. "I love watching them blow glass and create pottery, and to be able to take home a piece of that culture rather than a $5 T-shirt."

Before visiting a destination, Anderson contacts the local convention and visitor bureau or tourism association to ask for shopping recommendations. But that's only step one, because many small local artists and craftspeople don't have the extra funds to belong to these kinds of organizations.

So, she does her own research online, looking for artist websites or Facebook pages for local craftspeople. Searching for local arts and crafts districts can also turn up good places to explore. That approach has helped her find spots such as Crafted at the Port of Los Angeles, a collection of restored 1940s-era warehouses that are home to hundreds of artists and crafters plus a craft brewery.

Hiring a private driver in an unfamiliar destination can help ensure she gets to her must-visit spots. And when she can, she always enjoys talking with the artists and crafters and watching them work.

"It's more than just walking in and saying, 'Oh look, there's a pretty painting,'" says Anderson. "There's a story behind it. I think that's what really moves me. When I introduce myself and give them my card, it just starts pouring forth from them. So that's what really moves me. I obviously can't purchase everything I see. But they are often grateful that in my small, small way, I'm able to take the time with them and get the word out about their art."



The first deaf graduate of Sarasota's Ringling College of Art & Design, artist Christy Boutte encourages viewers to "see" sounds and "hear" color at her studio in New Orleans.

A colorful piece from Puerto Vallarta

> "It's more than just walking in and saying, 'Oh look, there's a pretty painting.' **There's a story behind it.** I think that's what really moves me."
>
> *—Kathy Anderson, Port of Call Shopper*

As the Port of Call Shopper site has grown and evolved over the past year, Anderson has sought out not only local art and crafts, but also clothing by local designers and regional food and beverage specialties. Many destinations have a local distillery, winery, or brewery worth checking out. And she's found interesting eats both near and far—such as the organic mushroom farm Far West Fungi in northern California.

"That's created a new interest," says Anderson. "So, it's trying to ferret out things like, is there a hot sauce the Caribbean is famous for and how is it made?"

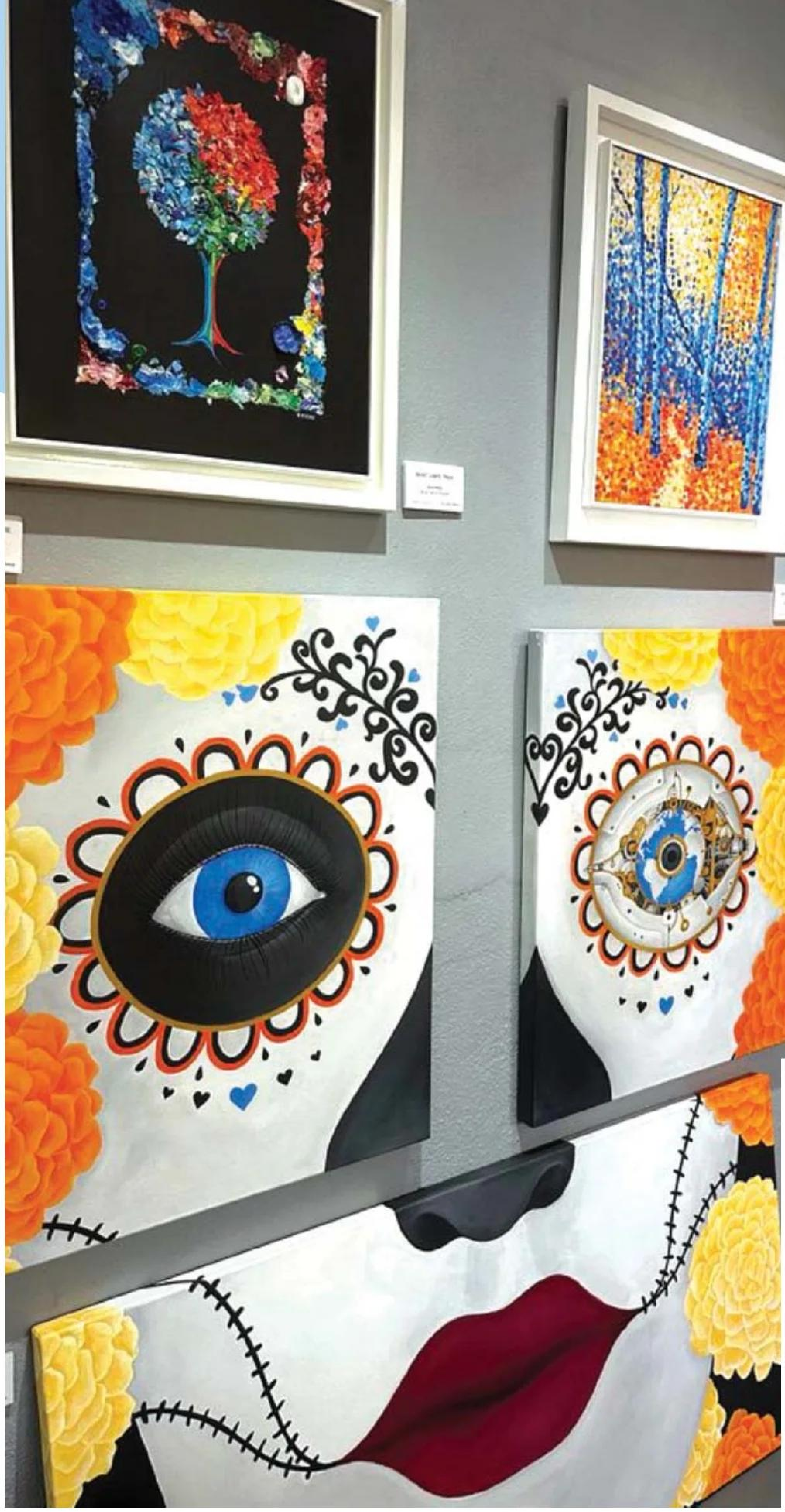
In late 2024, Anderson visited new-to-her destinations such as Dominica, St. Kitts, Antigua, and Martinique. She also took a river cruise to visit European Christmas markets along the Danube River. In 2025, she and her husband are chartering a powerboat in the British Virgin Islands in May, and she'll be taking a Mediterranean cruise in October.

The courtyard garden sculptures are a must-see at Galleria Dante in Puerto Vallarta, which exhibits the works of more than 60 artists, 85 percent of whom are Mexican born.

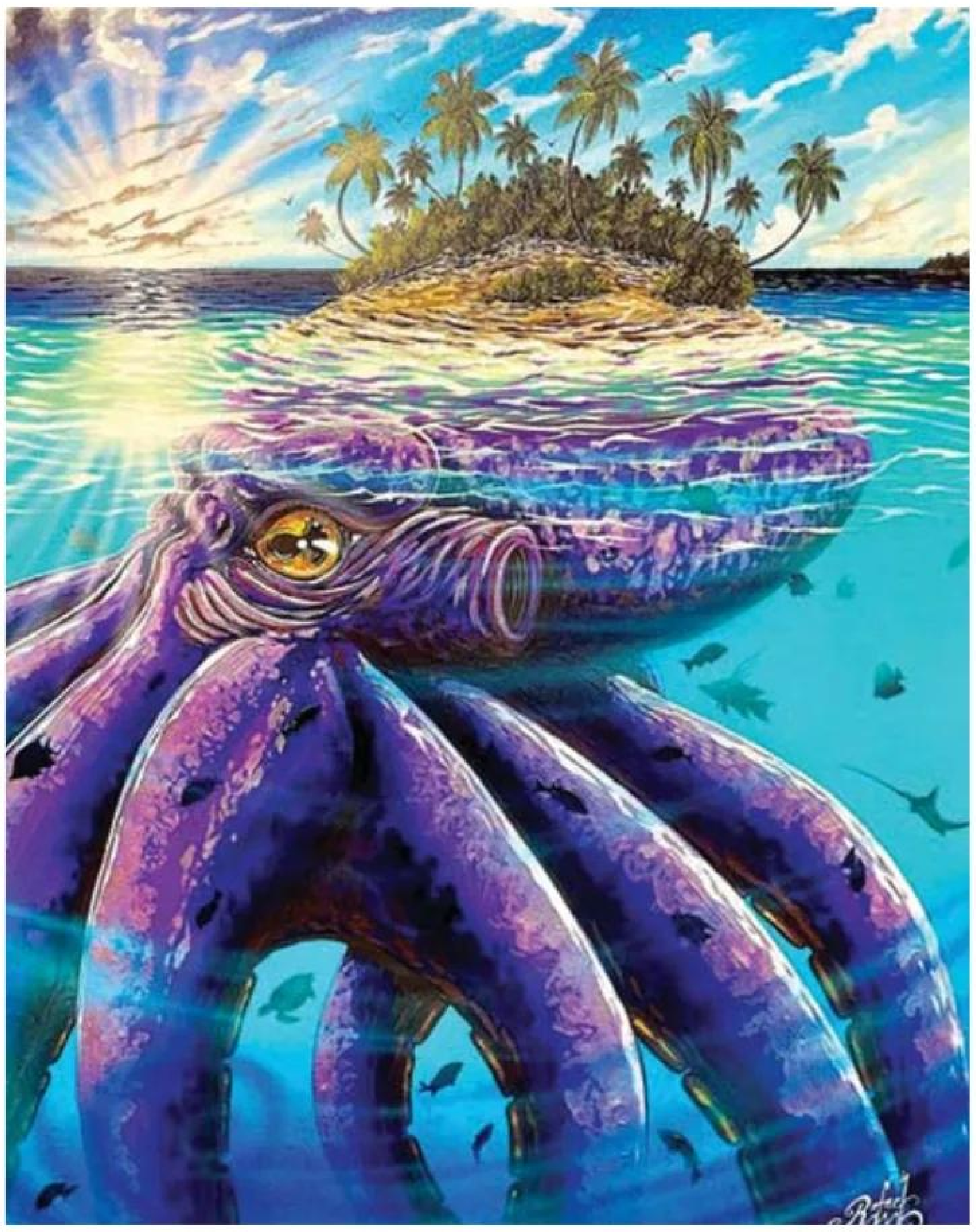
She's excited to keep exploring the world and get immersed in the local culture and arts scene wherever she can. "It's really what brings life to the destination," she says.

"I think most people think of travel as a vacation and time to relax," says Anderson. "But it really is much more than that. I think we learn more about ourselves as well as the other cultures… I just think it really is important, especially in these days and times, to find out more about the people around the world and maybe learn a little bit that we can bring home with us."

Beth Luberecki is a Nokomis, Florida–based freelance writer who's a frequent contributor to TOTI Media. Learn more about her at bethluberecki.com.



There are 17 working art studios and galleries at Qulture, a former boutique hotel in Puerto Vallarta's Romantic Zone, home to artists like Barbara Stenz and Wendell Hicks.



At Island Boy Arts, Key West native and self-taught artist Rafael Medina paints eye-catching depictions of sea life on both canvas and wood.

There's No Place Like Gnom

A sudden outcropping of mushrooms leads to some backyard whimsy

BY GLENN OSTLE

__Warning:__ this is the story of a lark that quickly grew out of control. We've since come to our senses and are documenting our experiences here in order to warn others of the risk of becoming obsessed with trying to create a bit of whimsy in your own backyard.

ALL PHOTOS BY GLENN OSTLE

me

It began one morning when we awoke to find that our pleasant little neighborhood had been invaded by mushrooms. Everywhere we looked there were crops of them, bursting forth from the ground in open areas and along shaded pathways.

At first my partner and I just wandered from grouping to grouping, admiring their size and how they had just appeared overnight. Initially we found their presence to be a little troubling; how dare they disrupt the beauty of our neighborhood! But then we had another idea. As long as they were here, why not use them in some creative fashion, perhaps as props and backgrounds for some photos. An idea was born. Now we needed to create a few "scenes."

Our next stop was our local Michaels craft store where we found a plastic tube filled with plastic figurines, including fairies, tiny animals… and gnomes.

Perfect.

Mushrooms and gnomes are often associated with each other in books, movies, and art. And you can never go wrong with fairies.

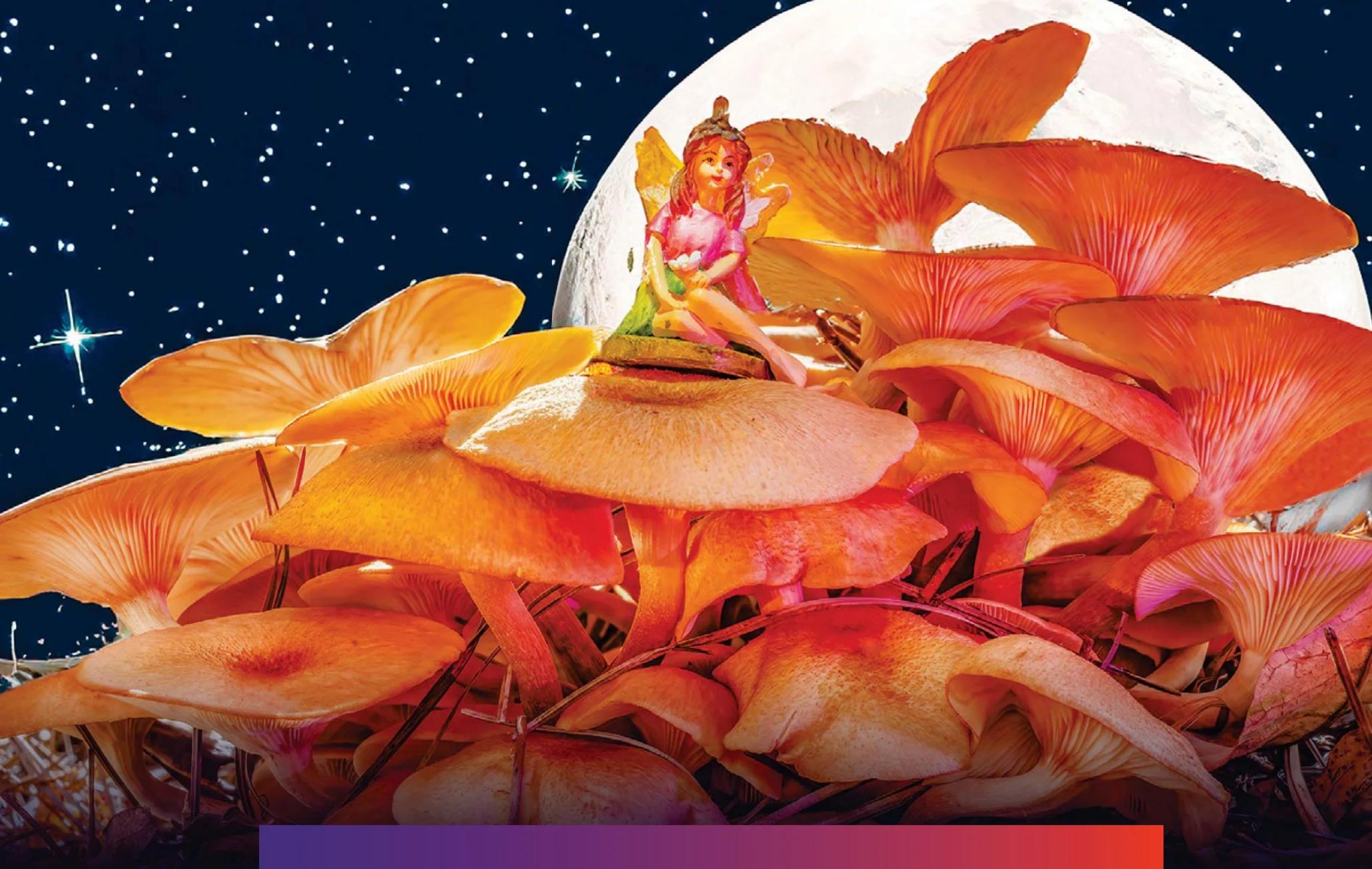
What followed were hours bent over and on our knees in muddy and gravel-covered areas, positioning our "cast members" in tableaus that hopefully told a story.

We began with the gnome with a long white beard, as he appeared to be in charge and perhaps was even a "wizard."

We set him up in scenes around various mushroom groupings, using an actual mushroom cap or flower to serve as his umbrella. In a few of the shots he appears to be standing on the edge of a rocky cliff, an effect achieved by positioning him among a group of mushrooms that had grown up around a decaying tree stump.

We later photographed him as a wizard sitting atop a large pile of mushrooms. To add more drama to the scene, we used photo-processing software to insert a starry sky in order to achieve a "dreamy" effect. We used this same effect later in a photo of the fairy princess sitting atop a mound of mushrooms, adding only a large moon in the background.

We had a lot of fun creating the scene that we call "Serenade." Two suitors appear to be wooing a pigtailed young lady in front of



> What followed were hours bent over and on our knees in muddy and gravel-covered areas, positioning our "cast members" in tableaus that hopefully told a story.

an old door (which was also included in our tube of characters). If you look closely, you can see that the action is being observed by both a butterfly (above) and a green frog (below).

To highlight this scene, as well as a number of others, we used a few colored lights (flashlights with colored gels in front). We liked this setup so much that we duplicated it in a winter scene using baby powder to simulate snow.

Next we began to experiment with some small figurines that we found around the house. We placed a pair of forlorn-looking dogs under a stand of purple-stemmed mushrooms. In another scene a villager seems to be proudly showing off his mushroom mound while being watched by a green frog and a bright red cardinal. Yet another scene shows a villager displaying a bright green cactus growing amid a mound of his 'shrooms.

That brings us back to the fairy princess. As mentioned earlier, she was sitting atop a mushroom mound beneath an artificial sky and an oversize moon. Continuing our contrived tale, we later decided that the princess and the gnome/wizard should probably meet, and we set the scene for this encounter in a bucolic environment.

After the princess departed, it began to rain (with the help of a garden hose), which left the gnome/wizard all alone and making good use of his umbrella fashioned out of a flower.

We were really getting into this stagecraft stuff and were pretty sure that Hollywood would soon be calling. Only a few days later, however, we came out one morning to find that every single mushroom in our neighborhood was either dried up or gone, a feat equally as mystifying as their original overnight appearance. This obviously brought an abrupt end to our roles as playwrights and stage setters but definitely improved the pain in our knees.

Despite all the time and effort we spent moving plastic characters around in imaginary scenes, we had to admit that it had been a most enjoyable and memorable undertaking. We hope that you like seeing the fruits of our labors and that you too can find the time to seek out creativity in places where it ordinarily is unlikely to be found.

Glenn Ostle has been contributing articles and photos for TOTI publications for more than 25 years. He and his partner, Pam Hadfield, live in Charlotte, North Carolina, and travel the world to scuba dive and photograph. His articles have appeared in a number of publications and his photos have been recognized internationally and have appeared on the covers of a number of magazines. See more of his work at featherandfins.smugmug.com.

BY GINA BIRCH

WHAT'S HOT IN SOUTHWEST FLORIDA

SELF-HEATING LUNCHBOX
A high-tech lunch box from UVI is the solution for enjoying hot and healthy meals on the go. Plug it in and it heats refrigerated food in 25 minutes, cooks rice, and steams vegetables. Outdoors, the insulated liner keeps food hot for up to two hours. Finally, the integrated UV light kills up to 99 percent of bacteria. From $99; uvilunchbox.com

CHOP CHOP A manual food processor is one kitchen tool that never goes out of style. The Pull Chop Utility Chopper from the Swiss company Kuhn Rikon chops herbs, vegetables, fruits, nuts, and bread. It's great for outdoor food prep, no electricity needed. The pull mechanism rotates the blades inside the container and adjusts to the tension you add. $32; kuhnrikon.com

FOR BIRD NERDS This time of year is a dream for birders in Southwest Florida. If you want to know more about the ones that flock to your yard or garden, the Haikubox from St. Petersburg, Florida-based Loggerhead Instruments is your gadget. It is a fun way to identify birds by the sounds they make. You will become a bird nerd in no time. From $199; haikubox.com

RECHARGEABLE LIGHTER A sleek fusion of innovation and style, the Flume Electric Lighter from Luma is a gas-free, rechargeable, sustainable alternative to disposable plastic versions. With up to 100 ignitions per charge, it also stands effortlessly thanks to a flat base. It comes in four colors. From $58; lumaflame.com

SECURE BEACH UMBRELLA
Winter is one of the best times to be on the beach in Southwest Florida, and a proper beach umbrella makes the day better for everyone. BeachBUB has one of the best umbrellas not only to protect you from the sun but also to keep your family safe on windy days. It's easy to set up and uses beach sand for security and stability. From $166; beachbub.com

COOL COMPRESSION WEAR Compression socks are not usually fashionable—unless they are made by Dr. Motion. The new fall/winter collection is out with a variety of appealing designs from crew to knee-highs. Whether you're a diabetic or an avid traveler, these socks are designed with wellness in mind. From $10; drmotionsocks.com, Kohl's, TJ Maxx

PORTABLE VACUUM Get rid of beach sand, kids' crumbs, and other messes when you are outdoors and on the go. Just charge up the Ayla Vacuum, throw it in your bag, and go. Cordless, small, and lightweight, it makes cleanups fast and easy wherever you are. $69; aylabag.com

MEXICAN STYLE A limited home entertainment collection from Tequila Cazadores, the Cocina Collection features many colorful, handmade items such as clay mugs. The project is in partnership with actress Francia Raísa and in celebration of Mexican artisans. $36.49; cazadores.com

A5
A6
memobottle

FAB AND FLAT The hottest new water bottles for traveling, outdoor activities, festivals, and more come in a flat design that takes up less room than traditional tumblers. The memobottle is spill-proof and dishwasher-safe, and its silicone sleeves can be customized. A portion of the price from each sale goes to water.org for providing safe water to communities in need. From $25; memobottle.us

JUKES 8
JUKES 8
JUKES 1
JUKES 6

HOLD THE ALCOHOL Dry January is here, and for those staying away from alcohol this month—or longer—Jukes offers a good alternative. The non-alcoholic canned drink is produced in partnership with famed Champagne house Billecart-Salmon. Designed for gastronomy, it has layers of aromas and flavors like a fine wine. If it weren't for the hint of apple cider vinegar, you would swear it was a traditional wine in a can. 12 cans for $75; us.jukescordialities.com

BY ANDREA STETSON

Kraig Feighery, director of instruction at Topgolf's Fort Myers location, demonstrates technique from one of the facility's 70+ all-weather bays.

THE NEW GOLF

More people are now playing off the course

Gone are the days when golfers would pick up a metal basket of balls at a local driving range and quietly hit into a huge empty field of grass. Today it is all about entertainment and having fun while improving a golf swing. The driving range on Williams Road is gone; so is the one on Old US 41 in Bonita. Instead, people are flocking to Topgolf in Fort Myers where 72 covered bays open up to a field full of targets.

Players can choose from eight different games to play on virtual screens that mimic what they are doing as they hit the ball. They can also choose images of famous golf courses around the world such as Pebble Beach, or they can play the most popular game, called Block Party, that has participants earning points by hitting targets.

"Topgolf strives on making this venue inclusively fun and for everybody," says Kraig Feighery, director of instruction at the Fort Myers location, near the Colonial Blvd./I-75 interchange. "They have really been able to capture something that a lot of people outside the window of golf have seen and want to partake in. Not only is there an entertainment element, but an introduction to the game of golf."

Feighery says customers are a mixture of serious golfers who want to improve their game and those who just want to have a fun day with family or friends.

PHOTOS ON ALL PAGES BY ANDREA STETSON

Since the first Topgolf opened in the United Kingdom in 2000 more than 20 billion balls have been hit, and the company expects that number to be 50 billion by the end of 2025.

“We celebrate birthdays there, and have family fun days there,” says Mary Anna Parisi of Naples. “It’s something the whole family agrees on doing, so it’s a winner.”

Marcia Frank was never interested in playing golf like her husband, Rick. But that all changed after a trip to Topgolf. “I’ve only been playing for a little over two years, and it is because we came to Topgolf,” she says. “I had not wanted to play golf for decades, and I came here and it was fun to hit the ball, so I decided I wanted to play golf. Rick had been playing over 50 years, and it fueled his desire to get back on the course.”

Now the couple plays on a regular golf course about once a week and heads to Topgolf twice a week. They say there are lots of benefits to this more modern approach to the sport.

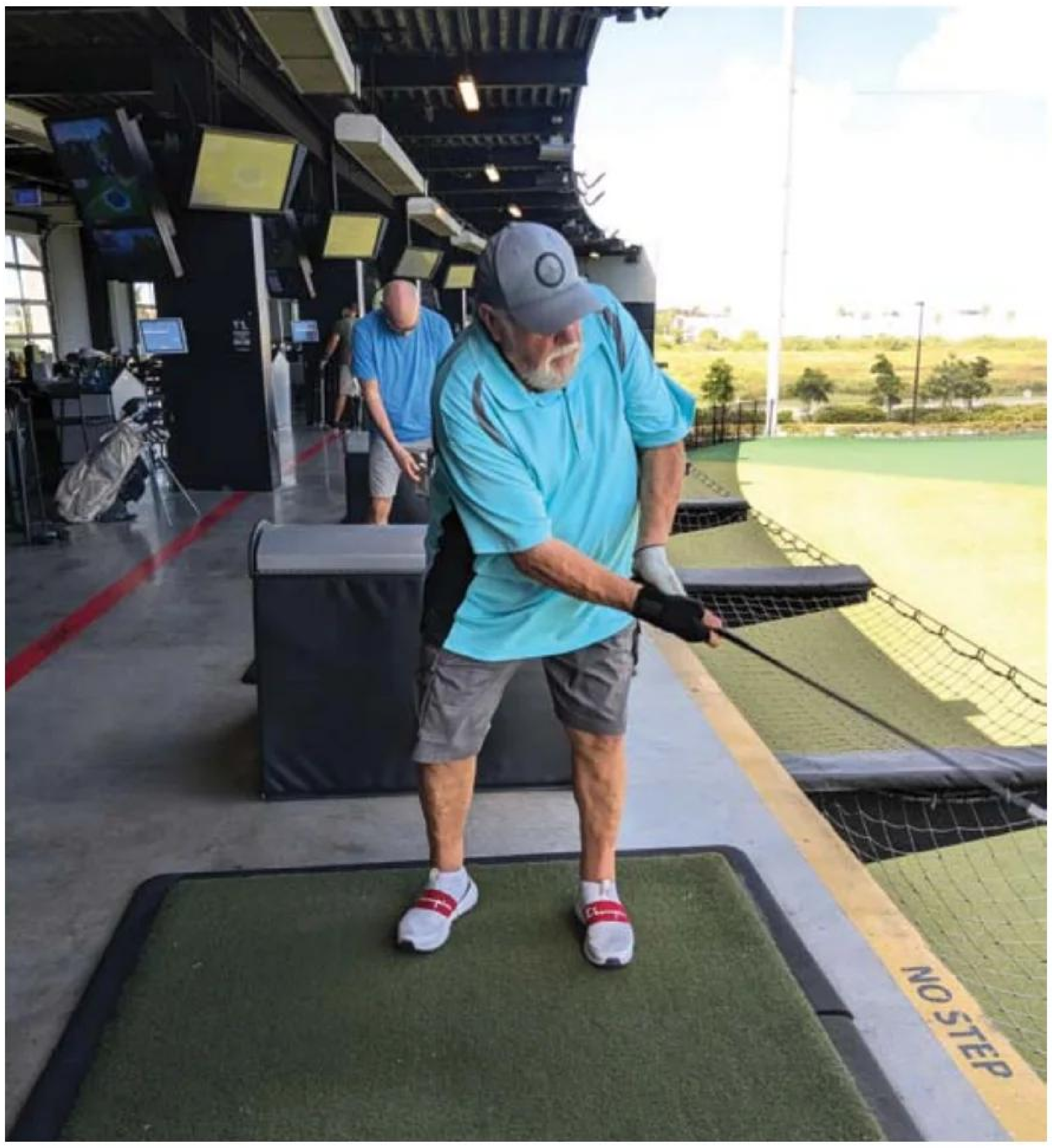
“You can go when it is raining,” Rick says as he hits balls under a huge overhang that keeps things dry and shady. “I can work on my strokes and just my game, and it is fun.”

“It is cooler. You are not in the hot sun, and you get a breeze,” Marcia adds. “And I like being able to see what I am doing from the screens.”

On a recent morning the couple was playing the Pebble Beach course virtually while hitting onto the driving range. They especially liked the idea that they could have do-overs when they hit a poor shot. They also like the price.

“We can’t afford to go play a round of golf two times a week, but we bought a membership for $700 and can play Monday through Friday until 5 pm, so we play here,” Rick explains.

Rick Frank hits a ball at Topgolf during a virtual game at Pebble Beach, one of many celebrated courses available to play virtually.



Frequent customer James Hoffman has used the Topgolf venue to teach his grandson how to play.

James Hoffman agrees Topgolf is both a great way to practice and a wonderful introduction to the sport. He is an avid golfer who comes three times a week to practice. He also used the venue as a way to teach his grandson.

“It is an outstanding place to practice,” Hoffman says. “You don’t have to chase balls around. I play at Cross Creek [Country Club in Fort Myers], but you can’t go out and practice on the course. I started my grandson out a year ago and got him on the golf team this year, and he is just 11 years old. The whole family—my daughter, her husband, and my two grandsons—would come over during the summer and hit some balls. He started out not sure if it would work, and as he kept hitting more and more balls, he kept getting better and he started to really pick it up.”

Hoffman believes Topgolf is a better place to practice than a traditional driving range. “The balls are in that big tank and they never run out and you don’t have to carry around that metal basket of balls,” he says. “Here you are paying for a multitude of practice ability and the ambiance of the place.”

The majority of customers, however, are not serious golfers. They are families and friends that come for the entertainment.

Parisi says her family’s favorite game at Topgolf is Angry Birds. “You aim the ball in the direction the screen prompts you to, and with each stroke of the ball you knock virtual walls over to get rid of the pigs,” Parisi explains. “Or we play the game of getting it into various holes to accumulate the highest points. The best time to go is at sunset, because you get to see the course in daylight, but then they turn the lights on and the holes all turn various colors after the sun goes down. We love the option of getting food delivered to your table too.”

Marcia Frank gets ready to drive a ball at Topgolf.

Steve Semmel also likes the entertainment aspect. "Topgolf is just a place I go with friends," Semmel says. "It's kinda like an indoor-outdoor bowling alley, only you hit golf balls instead of bowling balls. There are lanes on multiple levels. There's bar and food service on each lane like it was a bowling alley."

Semmel is there purely for the enjoyment. "I don't practice golf at all. I'm terrible. Topgolf is good if you don't want to brave the weather and a lot of walking. You can just hang out with friends like you were going to a bar with bar-game entertainment including golf."

In 2023 more than 35 million players went to Topgolf venues and online ranges around the world. Topgolf now has 90 locations in the U.S. and another 10 abroad.

Customers can bring their own clubs, but most of the recreational players just use the ones provided, including a new club called the Sure Thing that was designed exclusively for Topgolf. It is a shorter club that makes it easier for a beginner to hit the ball higher and longer. It has a handle that helps teach beginners the correct way to grip.

"It teaches one of the core fundamentals in golf, which is grip, so they can have much sooner success," Feighery explains. "It can keep the enjoyment high."

The atmosphere also keeps the enjoyment high, Feighery adds. "Topgolf is putting you in a place where you are learning and getting better and having fun doing it with a beer and a cheeseburger," he says. "They really hit home in making sure the experience here is top notch."

Customers can order food or drinks to be delivered to their bay or they can go to the sitting/bar area to eat and drink.

Regular prices range from $32 an hour to $62 per hour for the bay depending on the day and time. But there are lots of specials. On Tuesdays everything is half price. There are also $15-per-person specials for unlimited play on weekdays until noon. Dedicated players can purchase memberships. There are leagues where winners can earn up to $2,500 in gift cards.

Tuesdays and weekends are the busiest, according to Feighery. During season, people can wait up to four hours for a bay. Off season weekday mornings, except for Tuesdays, are the least crowded.

"According to the National Golf Federation, off-golf participation has surpassed on-golf course participation for the first time in history," Feighery notes.

Since the first Topgolf opened in the United Kingdom in 2000 more than 20 billion balls have been hit, and the company expects that number to be 50 billion by the end of 2025.

Topgolf isn't the only modern way to practice the game in Southwest Florida. Both Sports Challenge America in Bonita Springs and 810 Billiard and Bowling in Estero offer simulator golf as one of their attractions. At Sports Challenge guests rent a room by the hour and can choose from a variety of virtual golf courses to play. At 810 Billiards and Bowling, manager Joe Beach says, each simulator bay provides many virtual golf courses around the world. Customers can bring their own clubs or use ones provided by the facility.

"I like the social interaction," Beach says. "You are not going to be able to do that on the driving range. It is building that conversation and having a drink and an appetizer. It is doing what you love in a social environment."

Customers at 810 Billiards and Bowling are a mixture of those who want to practice the game on one of the virtual courses and people who just want to have fun with friends and family, says Beach. They tend to choose the games that feature targets or hitting the ball closest to the pin or the longest distance.

Andrea Stetson has been writing for magazines and newspapers in Southwest Florida since 1995. She and her family live in North Naples.

IF YOU GO
Topgolf
2021 Topgolf Way, Fort Myers
239-933-2035; topgolf.com/us/fort-myers/

810 Billiards & Bowling
10801 Corkscrew Road, Estero
239-766-8448; 810bowling.com/estero-fl/

Sports Challenge America
28120 Race Track Road, Bonita Springs
239-663-1810; sportschallengeamerica.com

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BY BETH LUBERECKI

JUST PICK UP A PADDLE

Still haven't tried pickleball? Here's what you need to know.

G.O.A.T. Paddle is hosting clinics this winter to help players improve their games.

PHOTO COURTESY G.O.A.T. PADDLE

Dan Schuyler admits he was a "a typical tennis snob" when he was first asked to play pickleball. Schuyler was a longtime tennis player who also supported the local professional tennis scene through his former Sanibel business, Lily & Company Jewelers.

He was playing tennis with the pro on Palm Island one weekend when he was asked to serve as the fourth in a pickleball match. He protested at first, but after 2½ hours he was hooked. "I have not picked up a tennis racket since," he says.

Schuyler took lessons, developed his skills, and became a serious player. So serious, in fact, that when the Covid-19 pandemic hit and it got hard to find places to play, he decided to build his own court. He found a property in Fort Myers and turned it into BeachBoyz Pickleball Training Center, a private training facility he runs with his brother.

While many players might not take their passion for pickleball quite to the same level as Schuyler, it's common to have the kind of experience he did after first picking up a paddle. According to the Association of Pickleball Professionals (APP), almost 50 million American adults have played pickleball at least once in the past 12 months, an increase of 35 percent from the last time APP measured participation in the sport.

While pickleball is often associated with the retiree set, especially here in Florida, it's not just AARP members who are taking a whack at the sport. The APP has found that the average age of pickleball players is 34.8 years old, showing how young people are also getting caught up in the pickleball craze.

If you're not already an ardent fan, you might have some questions. So let's start with the basics. Pickleball was reportedly invented on Bainbridge Island, Washington, in 1965 by three dads trying to entertain their kids. The sport, considered a mix of tennis, badminton, and table tennis, really took off around the time of the pandemic, when people were looking for fun but safe things to do outdoors with friends and family.

Pickleball courts measure 20 feet by 44 feet with a net that's 36 inches high at the sidelines and 34 inches high in the middle. Existing tennis or badminton courts can be converted into pickleball courts, or courts can be built solely for pickleball use.

For equipment, players need a paddle that is no longer than 17 inches and has a combined length and width of no more than

BeachBoyz owner Dan Schuyler made the switch from tennis to pickleball and never looked back.

Almost 50 million American adults have played pickleball at least once in the past 12 months.

24 inches. The sport uses lightweight, hollow, perforated plastic balls that resemble wiffle balls.

Pickleball is most commonly played as doubles with two players per team (but it can be played as singles). Once it's determined which team is serving first, the player on the right-hand side of the court serves using an underhand or drop serve that must go cross-court.

Pickleball has a two-bounce rule that says the first two shots of a rally (the serve and return) must bounce. After that, players can hit the ball out of the air or off a bounce, though there are some rules about when and where to hit the ball when you are close to the net in what's known as the "kitchen" zone. The rally continues until someone makes a fault by hitting the ball out of bounds or into the net, or there's a double bounce. You can score only if you're the serving team. Most games are played to 11 points and must be won by two points.

There are lots of great how-to videos online from entities such as USA Pickleball that provide a sense of the basics. If you've never played pickleball before, it's a good idea to take some lessons. There are options for that all over Lee County, from places like BeachBoyz Pickleball Training Center to the YMCA. You could also head to a public court in the area, which can be found at spots like Three Oaks Park and Wa-Ke Hatchee Park and Recreation Center, and see if any experienced players are willing to share their expertise.

"Go to some courts and tell people that you're new to pickleball and trying to learn," says Ryan Reader, cofounder of Naples Pickleball Center and winner of the men's doubles age 30+ level at the 2021 U.S. Pickleball Open. "Most people like to share. I've never met anyone who doesn't like to talk about pickleball, because they just love it."

Reader is one of those people, and he shares his passion for the sport in many ways. He has given lessons around the area for a number of years through his Paradise Pickleball business and now is cofounder of G.O.A.T. Paddle based in Estero. The

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Waymor Sports, the world's largest Picklr franchisee/operator, is building locations of indoor pickleball clubs in Fort Myers and South Naples.

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TOP PHOTO COURTESY BEACHBOYZ PICKLEBALL TRAINING CENTER; BOTTOM PHOTO COURTESY WAYMOR SPORTS

BeachBoyz Pickleball Training Center in Fort Myers offers lessons and private training opportunities.

COURTESY BEACHBOYZ PICKLEBALL TRAINING CENTER

paddle company is becoming his main focus, but G.O.A.T. Paddle also offers camps for players like the three it has planned for winter 2025, so he's not abandoning his love for teaching others about pickleball.

The sport's accessibility is a big reason for its popularity. Almost anyone can play pickleball. Schuyler recalls a weekend when he taught "a 6-year-old and a gentleman from Shell Point who called and said he was a young 102 and would like to take a lesson."

"It's so accessible," says Jay Sartori, cofounder and chief marketing officer of Waymor Sports, which is building courts in Fort Myers and south Naples for the indoor pickleball club franchise The Picklr. "You can go to Walmart and buy paddles for 20 bucks that can get you started."

For Reader, pickleball is a way to be in the moment. "Think of how challenging life is with ups and downs," he says. "Sometimes it might feel like there are more downs than ups. But racket sports make you play in the now. You can't worry about the future or the past; you have to worry about the ball you just hit over the net and be really focused in every moment. It's hard to think about anything that's bothering you while playing pickleball."

It's also just fun, even for total beginners. "Just trust yourself to show up and get off the couch and go play some pickleball," says Reader. "Have the confidence, have fun, and show up and play. There are friendly people willing to help new people."

"It's a beautiful community of people who are social," agrees Sartori. "There's fellowship and friendship and camaraderie, and competition too. I say to my wife all the time that we're in the happy business. It's an amazing thing."

Beth Luberecki is a Nokomis, Florida–based freelance writer who's a frequent contributor to TOTI Media. Learn more about her at bethluberecki.com.

WHERE TO PLAY

Looking for a place to play pickleball? Here are some options for both public and private facilities in Lee County.

Public Pickleball Courts

Brooks Park
50 South Road, Fort Myers

Camelot Park
1718 SW 52nd Terrace, Cape Coral

Estero Park and Recreation Center
9200 Corkscrew Palms Blvd., Estero

Fort Myers Racquet Club
1700 Matthew Drive, Fort Myers

Joe Stonis Park
3444 Ceitus Pkwy., Cape Coral

Lehigh Acres Park
1400 West 5th Street, Lehigh Acres

Lions Park
2550 Cleveland Avenue, Fort Myers

North Fort Myers Park and Recreation Center
2000 North Recreation Park Way, North Fort Myers

Phillips Park
5675 Sesame Drive, Bokeelia

Schandler Hall Park
419 Royal Palm Park Road, Fort Myers

Three Oaks Park
18251 Three Oaks Pkwy., Fort Myers

Veterans Park and Recreation Center
55 Homestead Road South, Lehigh Acres

Wa-Ke Hatchee Park and Recreation Center
16760 Bass Road, Fort Myers

Private/membership Pickleball Facilities

Ace Pickleball Club
2501 Alessio Drive, Fort Myers
acepickleballclub.com

BeachBoyz Pickleball Training Center
11680 Chitwood Drive, Suite 1, Fort Myers
beachboyzpickleball.com

DNA Pickleball
1900 Trailwinds Drive, Fort Myers
dnapickleball.playbypoint.com

The Picklr
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BY ANDREA STETSON

LET'S GO DRIVE A KITE

For the love of kitesurfing

The waves curl toward shore and the winter winds blow at a steady 40 knots. That is when Enrique Gianello loves to soar. He heads to water off the shores of Collier County to zip through the waves and occasionally lift more than 30 feet above the Gulf of Mexico.

Gianello is one of more than 1.5 million people around the world who enjoy kitesurfing (also called kiteboarding). He's one of the only kitesurfers in this area certified to teach the sport. While it is known as an extreme activity, Gianello says anyone can do it. Most of his clients are actually over age 50, and he even taught an 82-year-old.

"Kiteboarding is a super-easy sport, but it is one where you need to take lessons," Gianello stresses. "At the beginning there is a space in the learning process where it can be very dangerous, and you can't learn on your own. That is why you need to take lessons. You have to learn how to drive a kite. You don't fly a kite, you drive a kite. Kiteboarding at the beginning can be intimidating. After that, it is a super-easy sport, but it requires time."

Kitesurfing involves using wind power with a large kite to pull a rider across the water and lift them into the air. It combines aspects of paragliding, surfing, windsurfing, skateboarding, snowboarding, and wakeboarding.

Kitesurfing instructor Enrique Gianello prepares to soar off a Collier County beach.

PHOTOS ON ALL PAGES BY ANDREA STETSON

CABRINHA
MOTO X
12

Expansive beaches are best for kitesurfing. Popular sites in Collier County include Second Avenue North and Gulfshore Blvd. North, Tigertail Beach on Marco, and the Ten Thousand Islands.

On windy days you can see groups of people flying over the water from Barefoot Beach north of Naples all the way down to Marco Island.

When Gianello, 60, began learning the sport in 2002 there weren't any instructors in town, so he learned by his mistakes and admits he got badly injured several times. "In those times, no one was teaching, and a lot of people were hurt," he says.

Gianello found a school in France that was expanding to the Dominican Republic and he traveled there for a three-week course to learn more about the sport and how to teach it. He was educated in everything from weather patterns to sail design to safety.

"There was a way to teach people how not to get hurt, and I became a certified international instructor," he says.

His instruction begins on land where he stresses safety. He also informs his students about the equipment. When they get out on the water for the first time during the second or third lesson, he is always near them. "We don't leave the student alone," he stresses. "You should have a supportive boat for rescue in case something goes wrong."

Beginners should have 12-18 knots of wind, while intermediates prefer 12-25 knots. "Advanced are looking for 40 knots," Gianello says. "The more wind the better in kiteboarding."

Locally, Gianello meets his students at the beach by Second Avenue North and Gulfshore Blvd. North in Naples, or on Marco Island or the Ten Thousand Islands. He uses places where there is room to set up the equipment on the beach.

"One kite has 22 meters of line, so you are taking a pretty good chunk of beach, and if you have 20 kites, you take the whole beach," he explains. "That is why you see all over Florida people go to specific places."

On windy days you can see groups of people flying over the water from Barefoot Beach north of Naples all the way down to Marco Island.

Yago Crizando has been kitesurfing for two years and loves it. "I love to spend my time on the water and enjoy the wind and the weather here," Crizando says. "It is a very, very good sport,

Gianello teaches kitesurfing in Naples.

and Enrique made it very easy. He gives you the step by step how to start, and you just follow his instructions. It is not that difficult."

Crizando recalls it took about 10 times on the water before he could leave the surface and fly through the air. "The time on the water at the beginning is not that much," he says. "Once you learn the steps that you have to know about safety, that is when you start enjoying. The first three to five times you learn how to stand up on the board and how to do turns, and then you learn how to jump."

Frazier Gardella has been enjoying the sport for the past 15 years. "It is a real rush to be out there and to fly through the air," says Gardella.

The best time to kitesurf is in the winter when the cold fronts roll in and the winds pick up, according to Gardella. "You can enjoy the elements," he continues. "In Southwest Florida the water is one of the dominant features, and this is something we can do on water that is incredibly exhilarating and fun. It is really taking advantage of the assets we have in Southwest Florida."

Dougall McCorkle agrees. He has been kitesurfing for 20 years. "Kiteboarding is an addiction for wind enthusiasts," McCorkle says. "It is a great sport because it is easily transportable. You can explore different places throughout the world and see how the wind and seas are in those locations. It is an exciting sport where you can enjoy the wind and the waves. It is exhilarating. Everybody loves to jump high and get the feeling of flight."

Kitesurfing is not new. It was first documented in 1977 when a patent was filed by Gijsbertus Adrianus Panhuise from the Netherlands. Seven years later brothers Bruno and Dominique Legaignoux from France filed a patent for the first inflatable kite design that enabled the rider to instantly relaunch the kite in the water. Over the years the equipment was improved and the sport became more popular. Experts compete for bragging rights. In 2023 South African athlete Joshua Emanuel ascended more than 118 feet over in the North Sea near Hanstholm, Denmark. Jesse Richman, who was born in Hawaii, holds the record for longest hang time at 22 seconds, set near San Francisco, California.

Gianello, who moved to Naples in 1992, was one of the first certified instructors in Florida. He grew up in Argentina and always loved water sports. "I grew up surfing," he says. "I was a sailor and a windsurfer."

He would spend weeks in Peru, Chile, and Baja, surfing the waves. He was also intrigued by kites. "Since I was a kid, I liked to fly a kite," he relates. "I was always fascinated by kites, and when I saw a guy kiteboarding I was fascinated."

Now he not only loves participating in the sport, but also enjoys teaching it. Most of his students are between 50 and 75 years old. He says those are the people who have the time and funds for the sport. But he has also instructed children as young as age 5.

His approach to teaching varies, depending on the age of the student. "Teaching a younger person, my object is to put fear on it. It is dangerous," Gianello explains. "But when I teach an older person I have to take the fear out. They analyze everything. They think they can get hurt. I tell them, 'No, you cannot get hurt. That is why you take lessons from me.' It takes me longer to teach them, but in the end they learn."

Gianello says he has soared up to 40 feet above the water.

Even his 82-year-old student learned and enjoyed the extreme sport.

"If you have time, you will learn kiteboarding," he says.

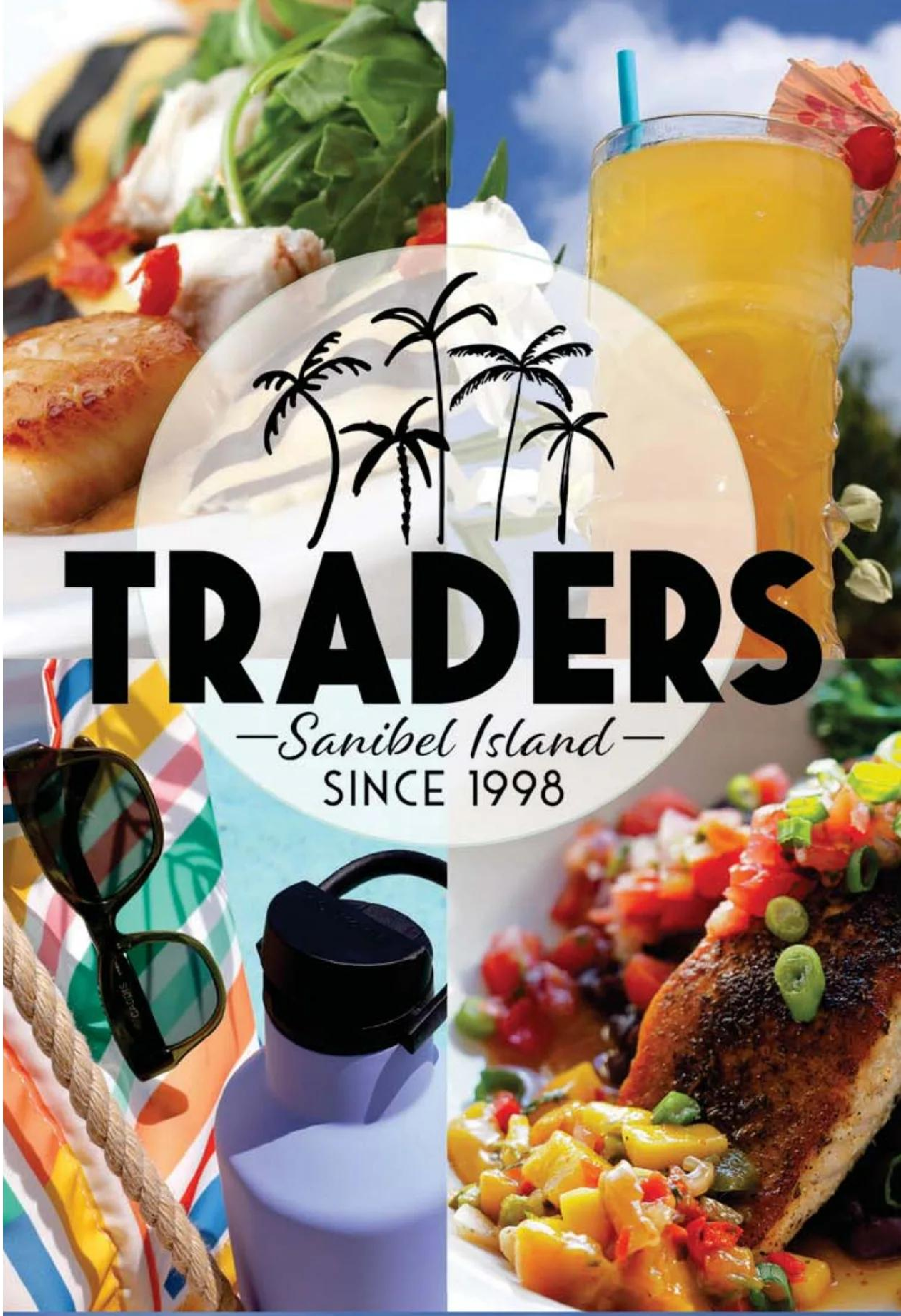
Gianello charges $300 for a three-hour lesson, and his clients need at least three lessons. He also offers packages that include the use of his equipment. "We do not push people to buy gear," he says.

The kites vary in sizes and shapes and are chosen depending on the strength of the wind, a person's weight, and level of experience. The average size is about 40 feet. Gear can be costly. Gianello says the sails cost about $2,500, and the control systems add $700-$1,000 more. Then there is the pump to inflate the kite, the harness, and the board. That can add anywhere from $300 to $2,000.

Gianello believes it is all worth it. "It is my passion," he concludes. "Not only am I teaching kiteboarding, I am teaching passion. It is an addiction—a good addiction."

Andrea Stetson has been writing for magazines and newspapers in Southwest Florida since 1995. She and her family live in North Naples.

FOR MORE INFO
Naples Kiteboarding
239-601-2700
napleskiteboarding.com



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BY ANN MARIE O'PHELAN

INTENSIFY YOUR WALK

Add to your workout with Nordic pole walking

In the 1990s, athletes in Finland trained for cross-country skiing in the summer months by walking with their ski poles. This technique involved participants pushing off the ground as they walked, and it became what is now known as Nordic pole walking. This low-impact sport engages 90 percent of a walker's muscles, including shoulders, arms, core, and legs.

The poles are unlike hiking sticks as they are specially designed to use one's entire body. They also have straps that connect the poles to the walker's hands. The pole tips can be used on hard surfaces such as asphalt.

The poles can be found at many local sporting goods stores. No special footwear is required; regular walking shoes are fine.

Ann Marie O'Phelan is a Southwest Florida resident and a regular contributor to TOTI Media.

LOCAL PARKS ACCOMMODATE NORDIC POLE WALKING

"Lee County Parks & Recreation offers something for everyone, from easy, scenic walks along paved trails to more challenging hikes through diverse natural landscapes," says Mack Young, Lee County Parks & Recreation director. "Whether you're looking for a leisurely stroll or an intense workout, our parks provide a variety of experiences for all levels of outdoor enthusiasts."

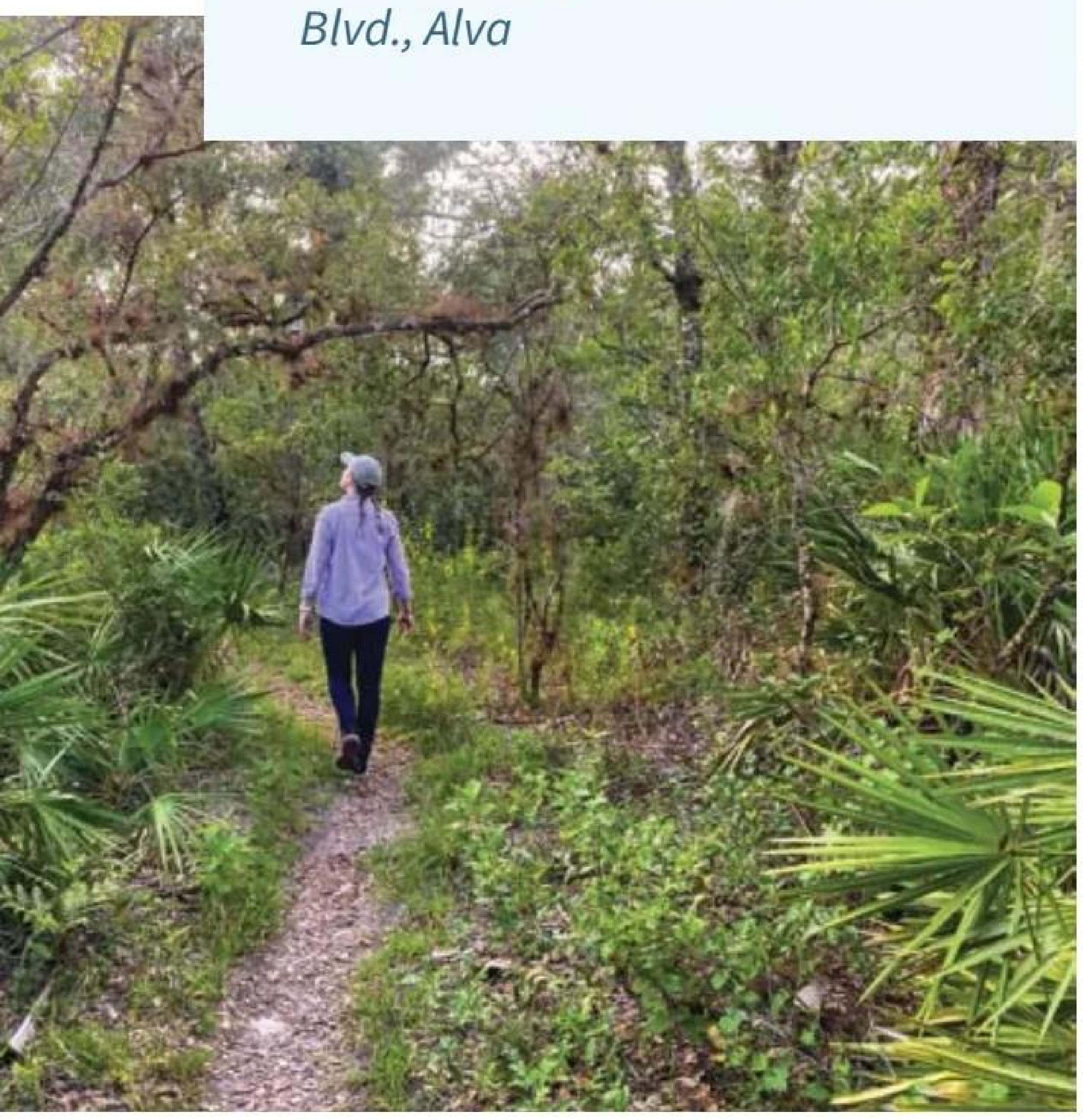
Following are a few parks that lend themselves to Nordic pole walking.

For more information about Lee County Parks & Recreation, visit leeparks.org.

John Yarbrough Linear Park Trail. This six-mile paved trail runs along the scenic Ten Mile Canal and offers a smooth surface for walking, jogging, hiking, or bicycling. Its linear design provides a steady, uninterrupted route for Nordic pole walkers to experience the outdoors and observe local wildlife. The park has restrooms and paved parking. *14608 Six Mile Cypress Parkway, Fort Myers*

PHOTOS ON ALL PAGES COURTESY OF LEEGOV.COM

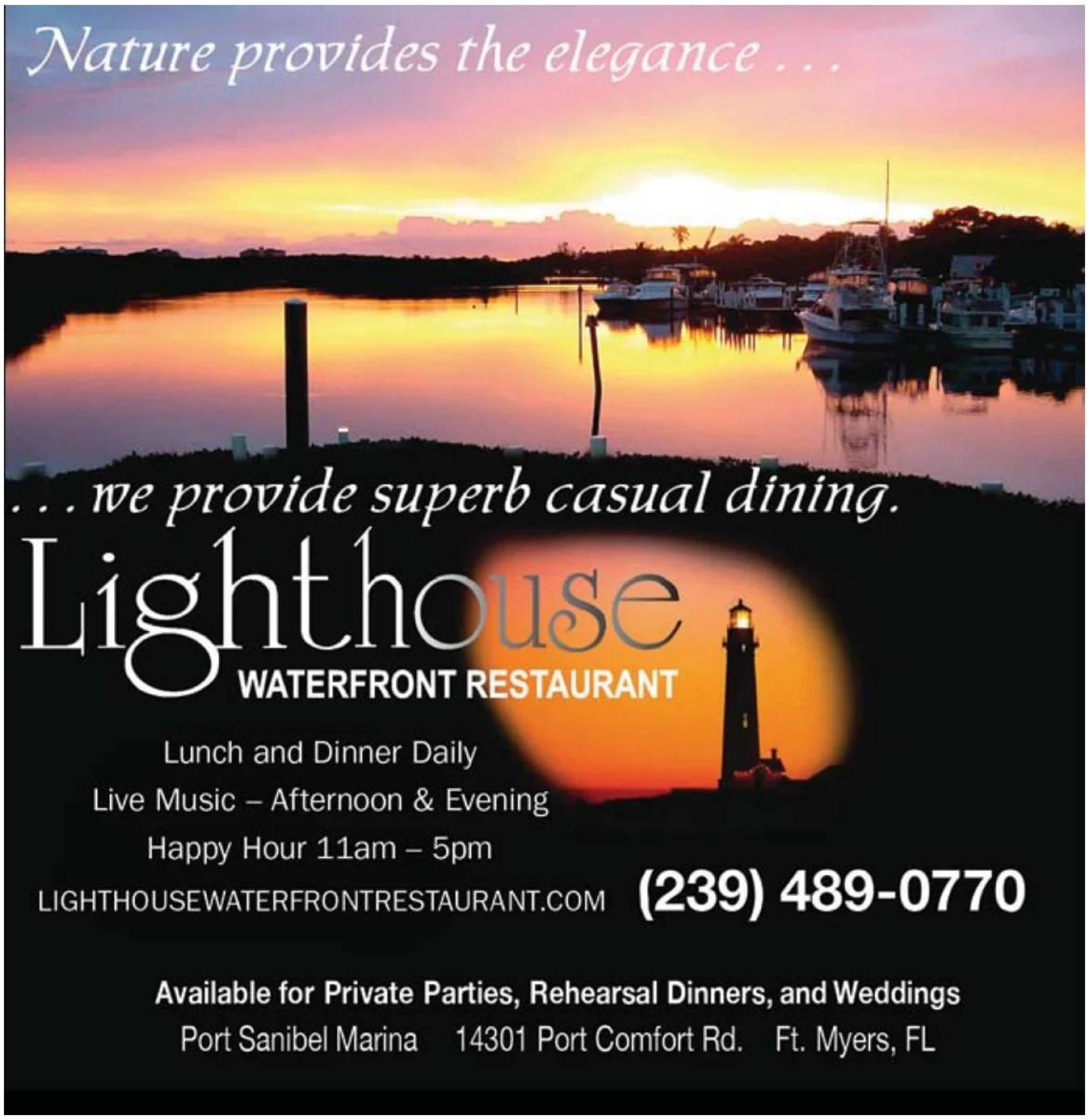
Hickey Creek Mitigation Park. With three looped trails totaling five miles, Hickey Creek offers varied terrain and natural surroundings. The loops provide different lengths and opportunities to experience a tranquil environment while getting a great workout. It's ideal for walking, jogging, walking, and bird viewing. *17980 Palm Beach Blvd., Alva*



TIPS TO MAXIMIZE YOUR WALK

- Start every step with your heel touching the ground and rolling forward to the ball of your foot and to the toe area. This will allow you to push off to propel forward.
- Your hands should grip the pole every time it hits the ground. Ease your grip when the pole is drawn back behind your body, and finish this movement with an open hand.
- As your arms move the poles, your torso and hips should be in a counter-swinging motion from your lower body.

To learn the correct Nordic pole walking technique: youtube.com/watch?v=8RrxSloH2Qs&t=1s



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Prairie Pines Preserve. This expansive preserve features approximately 17 miles of trails for hiking. The diverse landscape and dedicated paths make it an excellent destination for Nordic pole walkers looking for both solitude and nature in a spacious setting. The preserve also offers equestrian trails. *18400 N. Tamiami Trail, North Fort Myers*

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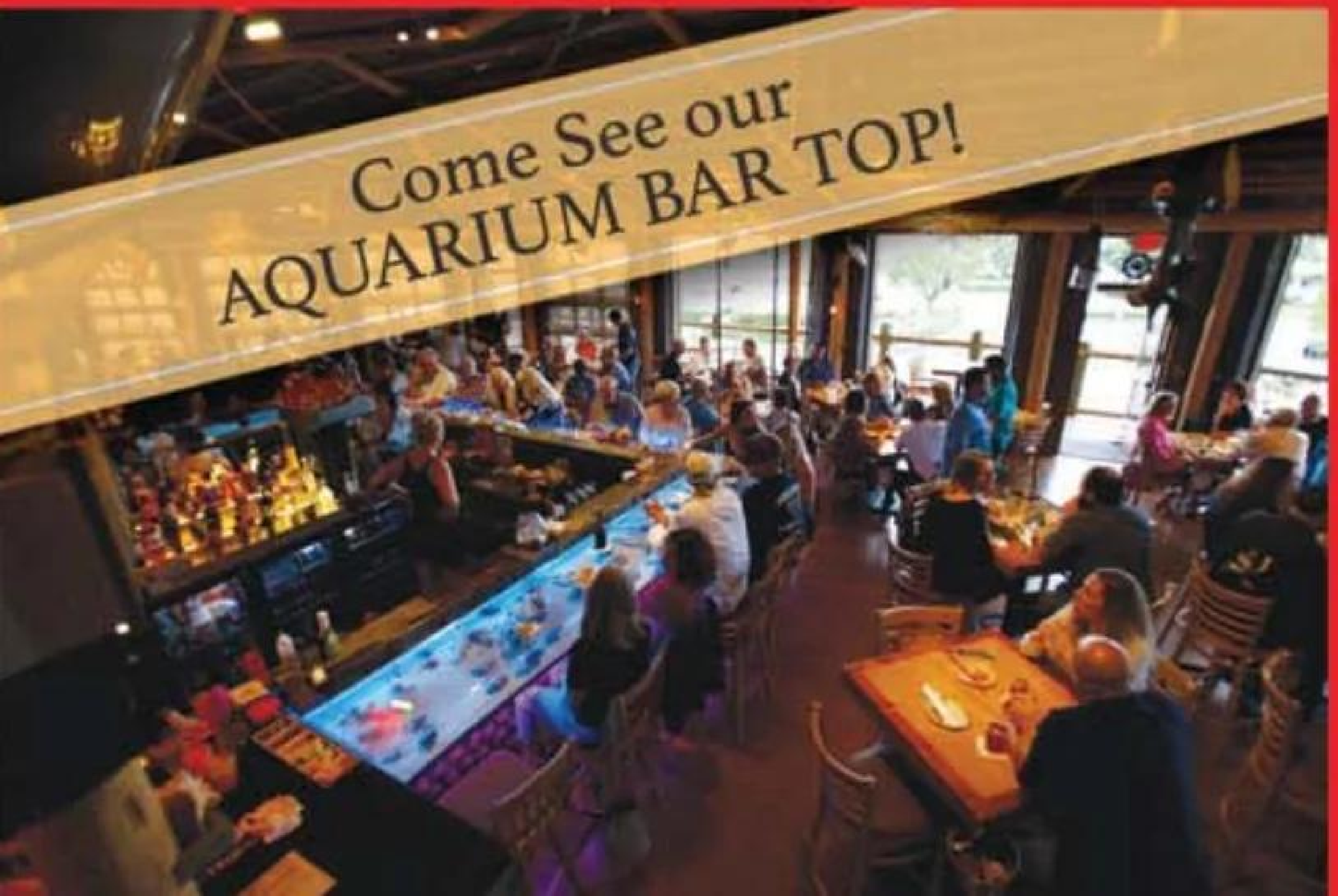

BY GINA BIRCH

THE VIRTUES OF VERMOUTH

An often underrated and underappreciated element to cocktailing

For many people vermouth is an afterthought, a mere mixer for a martini or mixed drink. While it is indeed an important element for a host of classic cocktails, a quality vermouth can stand alone. Yes, over ice. Here is a quick guide to appreciating and using vermouth.

Vermouth is a fortified wine. Fortified wines refer to those that are topped off with alcohol. This action stops the fermentation process. Even with the halt in fermentation, the wine in the bottle will continue to change and will not be preserved indefinitely.

It can still oxidize and go bad. Once vermouth is opened, it is best to move it off the bar cart and into the refrigerator where it can last a month or more depending on how it is made.

Vermouth is different from wine for several reasons. First, it has botanicals. That is why it lends itself so nicely to gin martinis. Pick the right gin, and the two will dance in the glass.

You can find both dry and sweet vermouth in your liquor store, although the dry is still a bit on the sweet side. Vermouth is traditionally made from white wine, but you will also see red and rosé. Like wine, they all have different characteristics that can add depth to a cocktail.

In many parts of Europe, vermouth is celebrated solo as an aperitif to awaken the taste buds before dinner. The beverage is having a comeback in Italy with the so-called vermouth hour instead of happy hour.

I recently participated in a tasting with the folks from 9diDante, makers of vermouths in the Piemonte (or Piedmont) region of Italy. Master blender Mario Baralis came out of retirement to help develop 9diDante. The name is inspired by Dante's "La Divina Comedia."

9diDante makes both a red and white vermouth, and the tasting gave me a renewed appreciation for the unique wine.

Purgatorio is the white vermouth made from arneis grapes. It has fruit flavors such as apricot and citrus. Herbal flavors include sage and rosemary. ($35)

Inferno is the red vermouth. It is made from a 50/50 blend of dolcetto, which is a red grape, and cortese, which is a white grape. Inferno is a lovely ruby red color with some hints of cardamom, vanilla, and orange peel. It is good in a negroni. ($32)

9diDante also makes a rosé vermouth called Paradiso, which I have not tried. I do, however, enjoy Lillet, a classic rosé vermouth from France. I had one in my refrigerator almost all summer and it held up nicely after being opened. Lillet screams spring and summer with its pretty pink color and flavors of red berries and citrus. Made mostly from sémillon grapes, it makes a great spritz.

If you are a fan of the Netflix series Emily in Paris (my hand is in the air), Lillet has some limited-edition bottles in big retailers, and it has cocktail recipes on its website (lillet.com/en-us/). ($24.99)

Speaking of recipes, enjoy the classics listed on the next spread from the 9diDante website (9didante.com/en/cocktails). Next time you are at a nice bar, ask what kind of vermouth they use, how long it has been open, and if you might be able to sample a little. You might find a new favorite for your next happy hour or to accompany a predinner cheese board. Cheers.

Vermouth is traditionally made from white wine, but you will also see red and rosé. Like wine, they all have different characteristics that can add depth to a cocktail.

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CLASSIC VERMOUTH COCKTAIL RECIPES

THE VESPER

We can't talk about vermouth without a mention of writer Ian Fleming's legendary James Bond character. He made the martini even more cool than it already was. In the book and movie *Casino Royale,* Bond's drink of choice was a Vesper martini, and here is how to make one:

1½ ounces 9diDante Purgatorio
1½ ounces London Dry Gin
1½ ounces vodka

In cocktail shaker filled with ice, combine all three ingredients. Shake vigorously for about 20 seconds, then strain into cocktail coupe or martini glass. Garnish with a zest of lemon.

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THE NEGRONI

The Negroni is seeing a resurgence in popularity. As legend would have it, in 1919 Count Camillo Negroni was at a café in Florence. He asked the bartender to strengthen his favorite cocktail known as the Americano, which is made with Campari, red sweet vermouth, and soda water. This is the result:

1⅓ ounces 9diDante Inferno Vermouth di Torino
⅔ ounces Campari
1 ounce London Dry Gin

Pour all ingredients into a mixing glass with a large amount of ice and stir for 30 seconds. Strain into an old fashion glass. Garnish with a twist of orange.

9 di DANTE
INFERNO

Gina Birch is a regular contributor. A lover of good food, good drinks, and a fun time, she is also a well-known media personality in Southwest Florida.

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BY CHEF MATT THOMPSON

Serves 1-3

Airline Chicken Breast

Season with olive oil, 6 thyme sprigs, 2 bay leaves, salt and pepper

Sous vide at 140°F for 2 hours.

While the chicken cooks, make the sauce.

1 tablespoon minced garlic
1 tablespoon minced shallots
⅛ pound unsalted butter
22 ounces of exotic mushroom blend
2 cups of white wine
2 cups of heavy cream
1 tablespoon chopped fresh thyme
2 tablespoons Dijon mustard
½ quart veal demi-glace

Sweat garlic and shallots in butter. Add mushrooms and thyme. Cook down until they lose their liquid. Add white wine and reduce by one-quarter. Add heavy cream, demi-glace, and mustard. Simmer on low heat for 20 minutes. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Slurry to thicken with cornstarch and water.

Prime 239 tops the chicken with pickled mustard seeds and honey-glazed carrots on the side:

Honey-glazed Carrots

Blanche and cool baby carrots

Sauté in honey butter (1 pound of butter, 2 ounces of honey, 1 ounce of champagne vinegar)

Pickled Mustard Seeds

Add mustard seeds to simmering pickling liquid

Place seeds and liquid into a container and let cool at room temperature.

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NATURE NOTEBOOK

BY WILLIAM R. COX

A DIURNAL BIRD OF PREY

Often mistaken for a bald eagle, the osprey is a majestic raptor in its own right

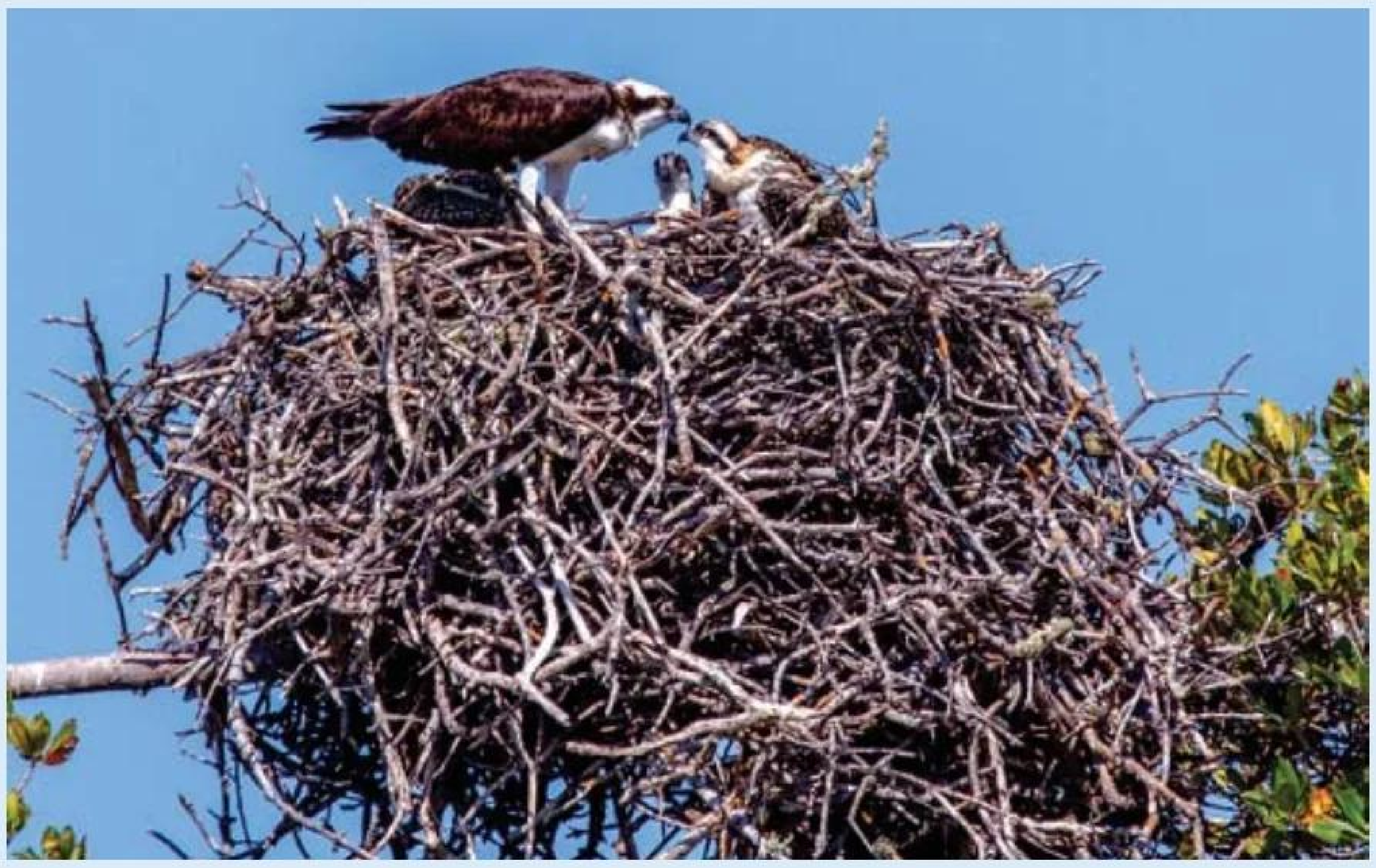
Diurnal birds of prey, also referred to as diurnal raptors, include the hawks, eagles, falcons, and vultures of North America. The 33 North America diurnal raptors belong to four taxonomic families: Pandionidae (osprey); Accipitridae (buteos, accipiters, fish and Aquila eagles, harriers, and kites); Falconidae (including the caracara); and Cathartidae (New World vultures).

Historically known as the fish hawk or sea hawk, the osprey *(Pandion haliaetus)* used to belong to the Accipitridae family, but because of its unique characteristics it was classified in its own taxonomic family. It is found throughout Florida and on all continents except Antarctica.

The osprey can be confused with the bald eagle. It is slightly smaller at 22-26 inches long with a wingspan of 4.5 to 6 feet. It has a white face with a brown streak behind the eyes, and brown nape and crown. It also has a white belly, crook-shaped wings, dark bill and legs, and barred primary, secondary, and tail feathers, whereas a mature bald eagle has a white head and tail, large yellow bill and yellow legs, and no barring on the wings and tail.

The osprey's main prey is fish. It is specialized in capturing fish swimming beneath the surface. It accomplishes this in dramatic fashion by diving from 15-130 feet high in the air to 10 feet deep in the water.

Its fossil records go back to the Miocene some 10 to 15 million years ago. During this time, the osprey acquired acute vision and crook-shaped wings to absorb the jolting impact when plunging into the water. Its wings also help lift off from the water's surface. Other adaptations include long legs and four large curved talons with a reversible outer toe to better grasp slippery prey. The pads of its feet are covered with sharp spicules that aid in holding slick fish. Its raptor beak is curved and sharp for cutting and tearing flesh. Its feathers are very oily from two uropygial glands used to lubricate the feathers for shedding water.

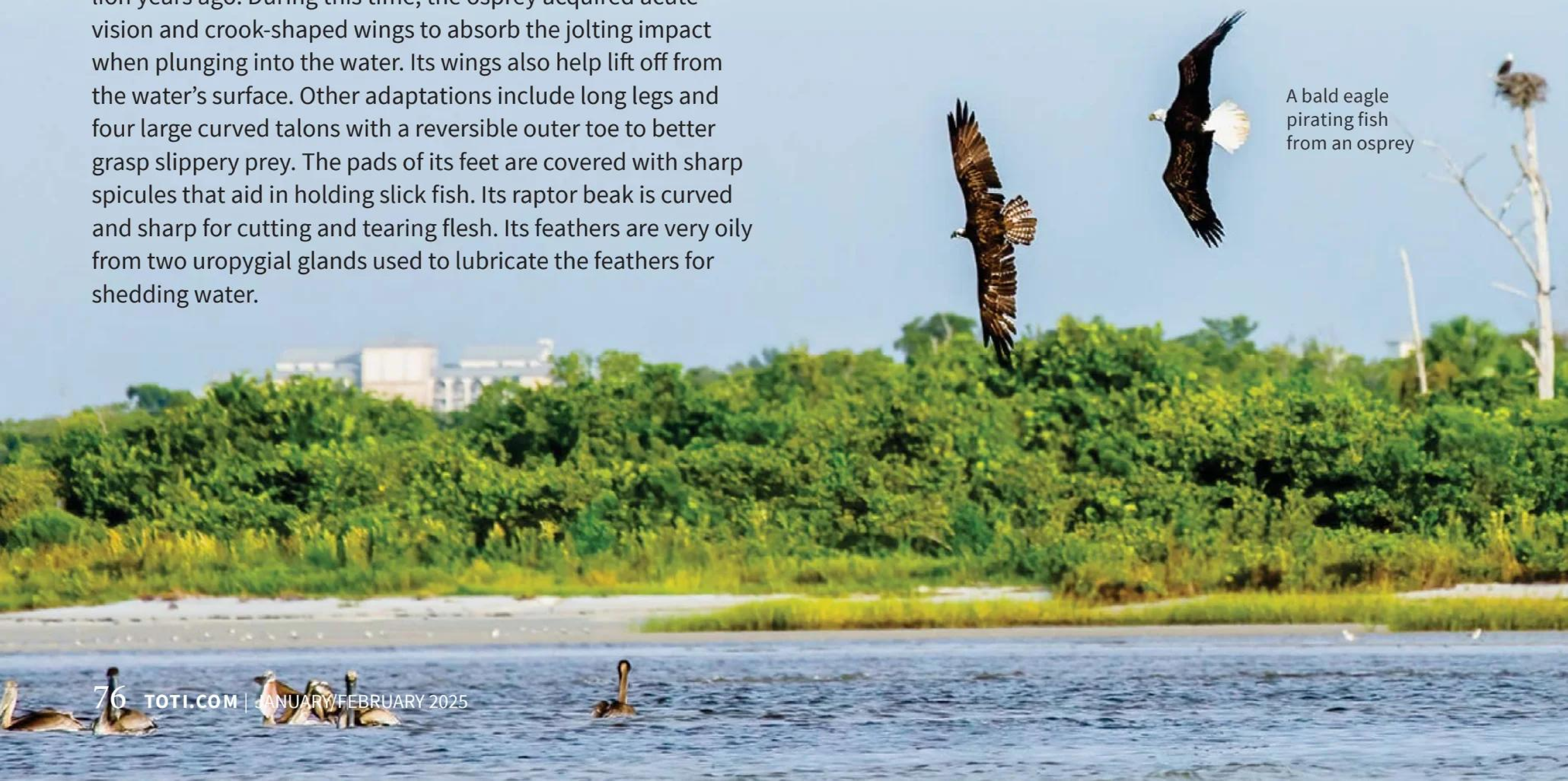

An osprey with three young in a large perennial nest atop a mangrove tree. Note its large, sharply curved bill for cutting and eating flesh.

When flying with its captured prey, the osprey positions the fish so it faces forward for better aerodynamics. These refinements and the raptor's mastery of the sky is why they are an inspiration to observe.

The osprey forages in all fish-bearing, clear, and open water habitats except shallow marshes. Its habitats include coasts, estuaries, lakes, and rivers.

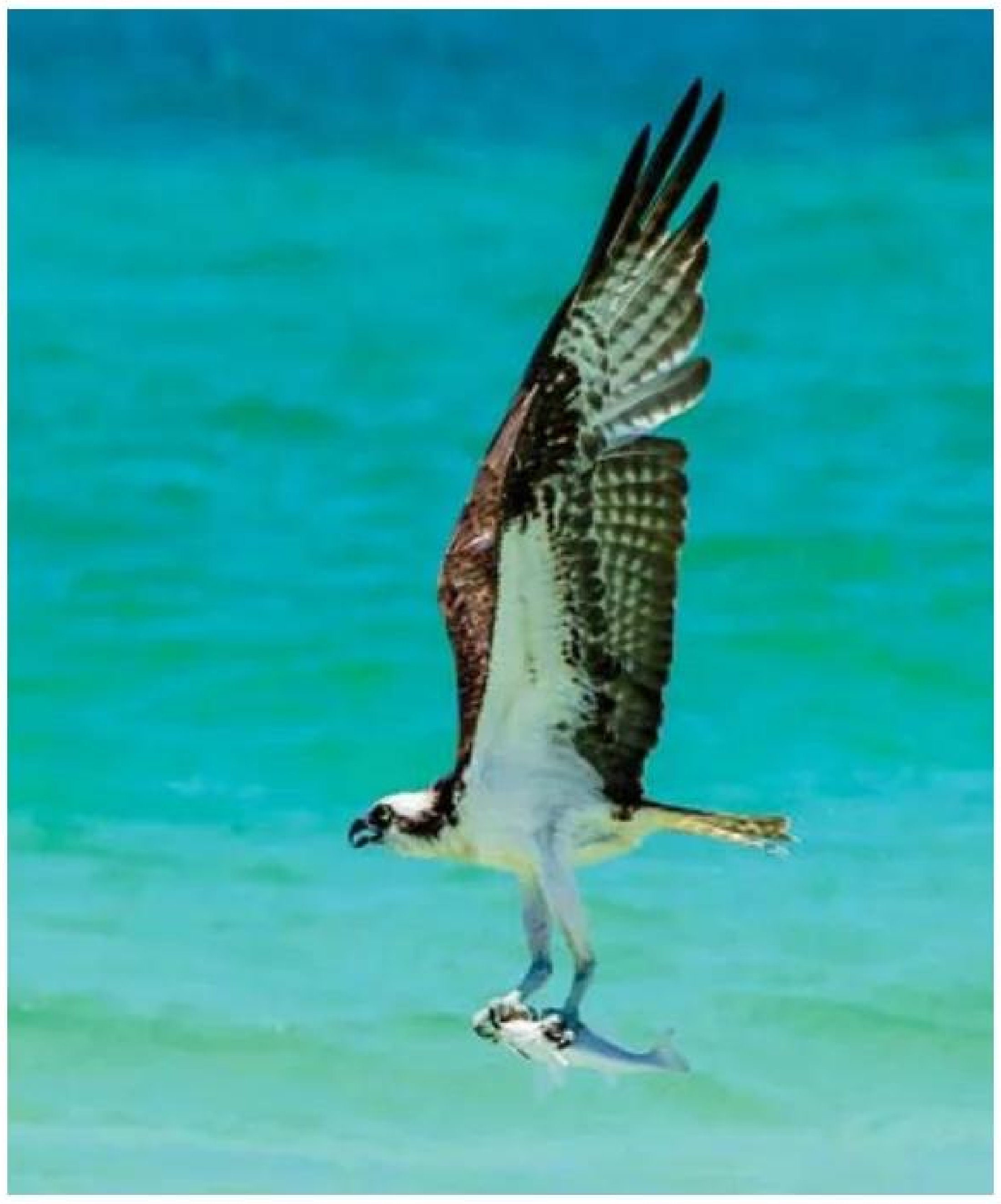
In Florida it nests close to water in late spring and early summer, building large perennial stick nests high in trees or on manmade platforms. Two to three eggs are incubated for

PHOTOS ON BOTH PAGES BY WILLIAM R. COX


A bald eagle pirating fish from an osprey

It is specialized in capturing fish swimming beneath the surface. It accomplishes this in dramatic fashion by diving from 15-130 feet high in the air to 10 feet deep in the water.

32-43 days, and after hatching, the young fledge in 48-59 days. An osprey pair produces only one brood per year. When they have three young, they must provide six pounds of fish per day for the nestlings. An osprey's overall fishing success ranges from 30 to 90 percent and must allow for the adult's need for food as well as the loss of captured fish to pirating bald eagles and magnificent frigatebirds.



The osprey's long legs, large feet, and long curved talons are suited to catching and holding on to fish such as this sea trout.

Osprey conservation has included banning of organochlorine pesticides, particularly DDT, and building artificial nesting platforms. The osprey population has increased significantly over the past five decades, thanks in part to the efforts of groups like the International Osprey Foundation, founded on Sanibel in 1981. Its mission of protecting and preserving ospreys worldwide is accomplished through education, building and monitoring nesting platforms, and research.

William R. Cox has been a professional nature photographer and ecologist for more than 35 years. Visit him online at williamrcoxphotography.com.

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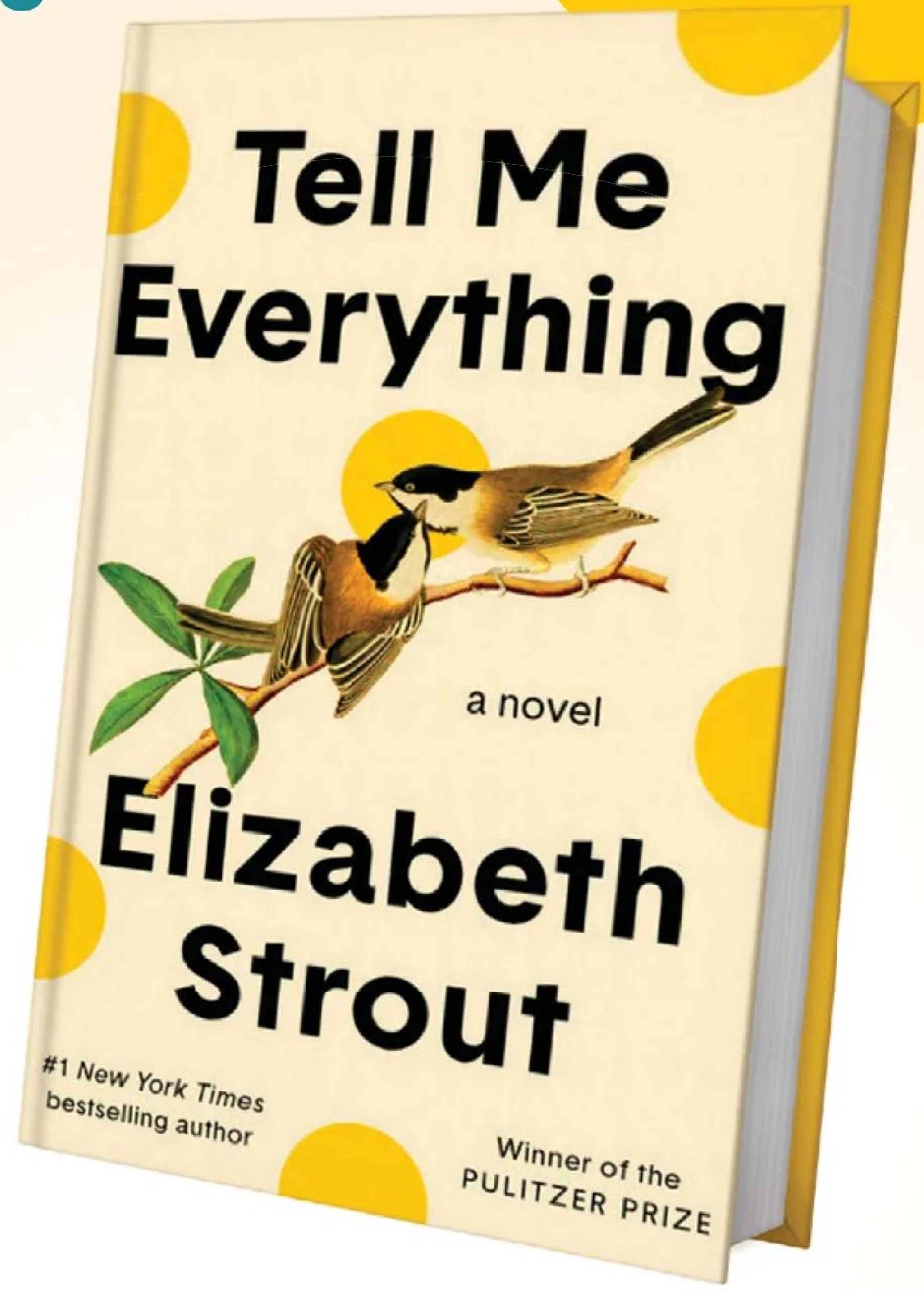
WHAT DOES ANYONE'S LIFE MEAN?

The endearing characters of Crosby, Maine, provide answers


Tell Me Everything
a novel
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Opening up Elizabeth Strout's latest book, *Tell Me Everything,* is like sitting down for tea with old friends you haven't seen in a while. Among them is the indomitable Olive Kitteridge, who takes a while to warm up to, but then you slowly realize she is a friend for life. Then there is attorney Bob Burgess and his brother, Jim; the somewhat famous author Lucy Barton and her ex-husband, the philandering William; and the many other endearing and quirky characters of the small coastal town of Crosby, Maine, and nearby Shirley Falls.

Strout made her mark in fiction in 2008 with her third published novel, *Olive Kitteridge,* earning the author a Pulitzer Prize. She went on to write (again) about Olive in *Olive, Again,* and she introduced us to Lucy Barton, William, and the Burgess brothers in subsequent books. These characters play recurring roles in intersecting universes throughout Strout's works. They all come together and come to life in a most pleasing fashion in *Tell Me Everything.*

The plot revolves roughly around a murder investigation involving the lonely and misunderstood Matt Beach, who is suspected of killing his mother. Attorney Bob Burgess agrees to represent Matt. By the end of the book, the crime is solved, the accused is absolved, and he breaks out of his isolation to find both friendship and love.

The crime gives the book its structure, but the real force behind *Tell Me Everything* are the stories of the everyday people that populate Strout's books. Each of these characters' lives plays out as they revolve around one another, finding love and meaning in many different ways. Two of Strout's strongest characters, Lucy and Olive, meet for the first time in this book, and they become close friends by getting together regularly and telling each other stories about people they have known—their "unrecorded lives," as Olive puts it. By relating the stories, the two women somehow give meaning to these lives.

This applies to all the characters on these pages as their lives intertwine and their stories unfold. The bond between Lucy Barton and Bob Burgess grows dangerously close to a love affair, stopped at the brink by their realization it could destroy their own and others' lives. This leads to Lucy and her ex, William, reconciling, while Bob and his wife, Margaret, reassert their marriage. At the same time, Bob and his brother, Jim, grow closer than they have ever been as they work through family tragedies and misdeeds.

Nothing big and flashy happens to the characters in this quiet but meaningful book, but together they help answer a big question, articulated by Lucy: "What does anyone's life mean?"

And then life goes calmly on its way in the little town of Crosby, Maine.

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Across

1 "Shepherd's delight" according to the saying, 4 words
8 Show off
10 Get onto a boat
11 Double bend
12 Night before the New Year
14 Costa del ____
16 State
18 It's better fresh
19 Raise
20 Small Chinese dogs, abbr.
21 Romantic outings
22 James Bond. for one
24 Stinging insect
27 Steak option, 2 words
29 Part of a jazz combo, abbr.
30 Father
33 "___ to the bone"
35 Green onion variety
36 Prepares beer or coffee
38 Craving
39 Highly valued

Down

1 Amy Adams or Nicole Kidman, e.g.
2 Key lime pie, for example
3 Nutrient-rich leafy green
4 Deep chasm
5 Take small bites
6 They are raised in toasts
7 Warm alcoholic beverage
9 Top grades
13 By way of
15 Begins
17 Venomous snake
19 "Confessions" R&B singer
23 Longed for
25 American birds
26 Second largest state, abbr.
27 House cat
28 Belonging to times past
31 Land measurement unit
32 French fashion house
34 Exist
37 Street, abbr.

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PHOTO BY STUART MONK

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ON THE COVER

Annual Burrowing Owl Festival celebrates the Cape's cutest winged creatures. *For the Birds,* page 26. Cover photo by Susan Oliver*

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